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D I R I G O

P O I N T

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**BOOKS BY ELIZABETH FOSTER**

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*Novels*

**SINGING BEACH**

**THE DAYS BETWEEN**

**DIRIGO POINT**

*for Children*

**GIGI**

*The Story of a Merry-Go-Round Horse*

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# D I R I G O

# P O I N T

*by*  
*Elizabeth Foster*

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*Boston — 1944*  
**HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY**  
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For G\_\_\_\_\_

*We'll to the woods no more,*

*The laurels all are cut.*

A. E. HOUSMAN



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## *Chapter I*

JASMIN left the bus at the corner and walked slowly back to the door of the Ritz. She was several minutes late, and she knew her father would be waiting for her in the lobby, masking his impatience under a polite exterior. But she could not apologize for being late, or even try to explain to him why she had spent the better part of the morning in Central Park, where the cherry trees were in bloom, confusing homesick thoughts of the Maine woods with a desire to spend the summer in town.

Roger Hawthorne was quietly pacing the lobby with one eye on the clock, and he did not see her as she came through the swing door. Jasmin paused briefly with an uprush of feeling. His hair was a shade grayer above the temples and somewhere in his travels he had acquired a sunburn. Her pleasure in seeing him again was tempered with shyness, for they had met each other very seldom during the twenty-four years of her life. Today, with the diffused light in the hotel lobby shining on his gray hair, he looked both handsome and distinguished. She wondered in parentheses how many boys of her generation would be as attractive at the age of fifty.

She walked slowly toward him and he turned and saw her.

'Jasmin! How sweet you look!'

He did not chide her for being late, and Jasmin thanked him silently as she put her hand in his. 'Hello, Father!'

'Would you like a cocktail?'

'No, thank you,' replied Jasmin, although a cocktail would have been rather pleasant because she was feeling tired and nervy, but

she knew her father liked a bottle of wine with his lunch. It was one of his habits — one of the few she had learned in their rare meetings.

Roger led her toward the dining-room where he had already engaged a table for two near the window. Jasmin saw that there was a gardenia lying beside her plate and she thanked him shyly. He began smoking at once, and she realized that his diffidence today matched her own. Jasmin felt tongue-tied. It was so hard sometimes after these long intervals to resume the easy familiarity which both of them wanted and which was always in danger of eluding them. Roger asked the waiter for the wine card and the menu, and she thought she detected a note of unusual strain in his voice. . . . But perhaps it was only her imagination, which had been rampant all morning. She realized now, in the noisy, mundane atmosphere of the Ritz, that she had read something into last night which was not there and never would be there.

'Jasmin, you're not listening,' said Roger with veiled impatience. 'I asked you whether you'd rather have a Graves or a St. Julien.'

'What are we having as an entrée?' asked Jasmin, coming to with a start. 'I can't remember what we ordered.'

'Can't you?' said Roger with a touch of amusement.

'No.'

'Then I'll tell you — we haven't ordered anything at all.'

Jasmin flushed, and Roger looked at her and laughed.

He ordered sole *Amandine* and a bottle of Graves, and the headwaiter went away and left them alone. An awkward silence followed which was broken hastily by Jasmin, who began to talk about the war. In her haste she thought the subject would lead to a number of safe generalities, but she was wrong.

Roger said, 'War is always harder on the women — especially the young women — because they haven't any future.'

He said it without pausing to think whether it would have any effect on his daughter, and when it was too late he saw her grow

thoughtful. Her eyes clouded and she put down her glass. . . . There would be nothing for her, or for anyone else in her generation, if America went to war. And she would lose what she wanted before she had it. The thing to do, of course, was not to think at all.

Roger looked at her with a quizzical expression. ‘Don’t let’s talk about the war, Jasmin,’ he said. ‘Let’s talk about you. What have you been up to lately?’

‘Oh, I’ve been very gay,’ said Jasmin evasively.

‘Are you still taking singing lessons?’

‘Yes — twice a week.’

Jasmin paused, and then added, ‘I hope to get a radio job in the fall.’

She could tell from his silence that Roger was not much in sympathy with this idea. She was sorry, because she had hoped he would approve and would give her the encouragement which she missed from the rest of the family.

‘Do you know,’ said Roger, ‘I’ve never heard you sing.’

‘You haven’t missed much,’ she replied.

‘Your grandmother says your voice is exquisite,’ added Roger.

Jasmin observed that all her grandmother’s geese were swans, and that in everyone else’s opinion her voice was untrained and shaky in the upper registers. ‘But when did you see Gran?’ she asked in surprise.

‘Thursday, at the Philharmonic.’

Jasmin wondered why no one had told her of this encounter. She said that her grandmother hadn’t changed appreciably in twenty years, and he must have found her much the same. Roger asked if she was going to Maine this summer.

‘Oh, yes, but not until the end of June. She hopes the black flies will be over by then.’

‘They never are.’

Roger moved his long slender hands over the silver in front of him and avoided Jasmin’s eyes.

'Jasmin, when are you going to Maine?' There was no emphasis on the word 'you.' He could have meant it in the plural, 'your mother and you.'

'Tonight,' she replied briefly, and the word fell on the noisy room with a dull explosion. Roger looked at her in silence, controlling his expression so that it remained impassive.

'Tonight,' she repeated, 'so I won't see you again, I'm afraid.'

'Aren't you going rather early?' asked Roger. 'In my day we never went before the first of June.'

'We weren't going for another two weeks, but day before yesterday Mother had one of her impulses.'

'The day before yesterday?' exclaimed Roger half to himself, — 'oh!'

There was a pause, and then he attacked his filet of sole.

Jasmin felt that she must talk or he would notice her abstraction. 'Uncle Sandy's going with us,' she continued glibly. 'The idea is that we're to be there in time for the smelt fishing.'

'— And I,' she added privately, 'have to go along as a chaperone, and I don't want to! — I don't want to!'

'Oh, so Sandy's going, is he?' said Roger, and if Jasmin had been listening she would have noticed the dryness in his voice.

'Yes,' said Jasmin; 'he always comes up with us in spring, and then he comes back in October for the shooting.'

'Is the shooting any good now?'

'Better,' said Jasmin briefly, wondering if she could persuade her grandmother to go in her place.

'How do you account for that?'

'We've had a dry spring for the past two years. — By the way, that reminds me — your old twenty-gauge is up at camp. Do you want me to send it to you?'

'No, thanks, it never really fit me.'

'It *does* fit me,' confessed Jasmin hesitantly. 'I've been using it. I hope you don't mind.'

'Mind! — why should I?' laughed Roger. Then the full im-

port of what she was saying struck him and he looked thoughtful. Jasmin was eating sole with her mind on her approaching trip, and she was totally unaware of the confusion she had caused. Roger thought of a great many things in rapid succession, some of which had never occurred to him before.

It had never entered his head, for instance, that a girl could share one of his favorite pursuits, but here was Jasmin saying calmly that she had been using his old shotgun.

It struck him that she was not only the product of his body, but of his mind as well.

She had his slanting eyebrows and flat ears, but she also had his shotgun.

Roger found his voice. ‘Who taught you to shoot — Sandy?’  
‘No, Bert. You remember Bert, don’t you?’

Roger answered that it was impossible to forget him. He was annoyed and depressed to learn that the family guide had taught his daughter how to shoot. ‘— And I suppose he taught you how to fish, also,’ he added with unmistakable bitterness. ‘There was no one else to do it.’

‘Grandmother taught me how to fish,’ said Jasmin mildly.  
‘You know that Bert hates fishing.’

Roger gazed at his daughter helplessly across the narrow table. Her head was bent over her food, and a beam of sunlight from the street outside was glowing softly in her pale blond hair. Her oval face, built like his own but more deliberately, was grave and sweet, and there was the ghost of a smile in her gray eyes. She was thinking of something that pleased her. She seemed more lovely and more valuable to him today than ever before. He wanted to explain why he had gone away and left her years ago so that he would be in no danger of losing her now. There was so much to explain, and yet he was always helpless in the face of it. How could he possibly tell her why he had left her mother, when he didn’t quite know why himself?

‘Jasmin!’

'Yes, Father?' she answered, looking up.

His voice failed him.

'What is it, Father?' she repeated.

'Nothing, Jasmin, only—only you must think I'm a heel to have left you in charge of Bert. I assure you it wasn't because I didn't love you. But there were reasons—'

'I know,' said Jasmin quietly. 'You and Mother weren't in love with each other. That was all. And I think it's a crime to live with someone you don't love. So I don't blame you. I know how it happened.'

'You *don't* know,' said Roger flatly; 'you're much too young to have any idea what happens to a marriage when it starts to crack up. And I hope you'll never find out.'

Jasmin said nothing and clasped her hands together under the table.

Roger added warmly, 'You're not one of these cynical young things who think that all marriages end in divorce, are you? — I hope your mother and I haven't done that to you.'

'No, of course not!'

'I'd never forgive myself if I thought you didn't want to get married because we made such a mess of our lives.'

Jasmin answered him gravely. 'I suppose you're worried because I'm twenty-four and not married yet. I can see what's in your mind.'

Roger confessed that the thought had occurred to him.

'I can promise you,' continued Jasmin, 'that you and Mother had nothing to do with it. I never found the right person — that was all.'

She had an overpowering desire to confide in him, to reveal everything that was in her mind that afternoon and hear what he had to say about it. After all, he was her father, he was her own flesh and blood. It was more than possible he would understand. But something held her back. She was afraid it would be unlucky to put her hope into words. It was so tenuous that

she was terrified it would vanish if she tried to give it substance. And yet, she ached to tell someone.

She would have been astounded if she had known that more or less the same emotion was stirring in his own breast—he was longing to tell her what was in his mind, but he knew he mustn't.

'Let's have a brandy,' he said suddenly.

Jasmin relaxed with a feeling of anticlimax. She was glad that the moment had passed because she was sure she was right in keeping her emotions to herself. She would be so humiliated if none of it was true. Her grandmother had often warned her that she had an unusually vivid imagination.

'Jasmin,' said Roger, 'how long are you going to be in Maine?'

'God knows!' thought Jasmin to herself with a feeling of utmost depression.

Aloud she said she had no idea. Probably for the whole summer.

'I don't know that I like the idea of that,' said Roger with a frown. 'Camp is no place for you all summer. You ought to be with people of your own age. Why doesn't your mother take you down to the coast, to Bar Harbor or Northeast or some place like that?'

'She can't,' said Jasmin briefly. 'We're not rich, Father, you know.'

'My fault again,' said Roger to himself. If he and Laura had stayed together, they would have had a comfortable income, but apart they were not very well off. 'Still and all,' he said aloud, 'you could rent the camp for July and August and take a small house on the coast.'

'We couldn't leave Gran.'

'Is there any reason why you couldn't take your grandmother with you?'

'Well, I suppose we could, but I don't think she'd be very happy.'

Roger shook his head. 'I know you think this is none of my business, after the way I've shelved my responsibilities for the past twenty years, but I don't think your mother and grandmother quite realize what they're doing to you.'

'I think it was a mistake,' he added, 'to let your mother have complete custody.'

Jasmin said with a laugh, 'You've forgotten that Mother's custody stopped when I was fourteen. I could have lived with you after that if you'd wanted me.'

Roger was stung, but he knew he deserved it. He had never made any effort to have her with him, and he realized that Jasmin had suffered as a result. For months out of every year she had been denied the society of her own age, and both he and Laura were to blame.

Jasmin put her hand on his. 'I'm sorry, Father! I didn't mean to say that. Of course I know you wanted me, and just couldn't have me. It would have been different if you'd married again and had a home. And you mustn't worry about me, because I'm all right. I'm not lonely in camp — I adore it. There's always a lot to keep me busy, and we have company almost every weekend.'

'Perhaps this summer . . .' said Roger musingly, not listening to her. 'Would you like to spend July and August with me?'

'Yes, I'd love to spend it with you,' agreed Jasmin, 'right here in town. I don't want to go to Northeast.'

'Why not?'

'For purely selfish reasons. If I could spend the summer in New York, I could take more singing lessons.'

Jasmin felt uncomfortable, for the reason she was giving him was not the truth. But she went on almost with a feeling of despair. 'You could take a small apartment and I could come and live with you. I'm a good cook,' she added.

Roger smiled. 'I'm sure you are, Jasmin, but I'd much rather see you cooking lobsters on the beach than fussing around a

stuffy kitchenette. I'll talk to you about this later when I know what my plans are going to be.'

Jasmin reminded him that she was leaving for Maine at nine o'clock, and that if he wanted to get in touch with her he would have to write or telegraph. She looked at her watch.

'I must go home and pack,' she said nervously, untruthful to the last. 'It's after three.'

'Will you telephone me before you leave? I'll be at the University Club.'

Jasmin said she would call him at half-past seven and rose, wondering if she ought to leave him quite so soon. Her conscience smote her because he looked at her wistfully. But as he made no protest she gave him a brief kiss on the forehead, picked up her gardenia, and walked swiftly away from him down the crowded room.

Roger stared at his brandy glass for a minute or two, then paid the check and left the dining-room. In the lobby he paused, looking glumly at the telephone booths near the side door. He seemed to be torn with indecision. People milled around him and he paid no attention to them, his eyes filled with doubt. Then he walked very slowly, very quietly into the telephone booth and closed the door. As he dropped a nickel into the coin box he was disgusted to find that his heart was thumping against his ribs.

After what seemed a long while a feminine voice answered.

'Hello, Laura,' he said briefly, 'this is Roger.'

'Yes, hello,' said Laura. He could hear no emotion in her voice whatever. It was almost as though she had been expecting him to call and was not at all surprised. Roger was disconcerted.

'I had lunch with Jasmin,' he began awkwardly.

'Yes, I know you did.'

'I want to talk to you about her. There are one or two things which are worrying me.'

'What's the matter?'

'Well, in the first place, she's got something on her mind. I don't know what it is, but she's all up in the air. And I don't like the idea of that radio job. I know more about radio work than you do, Laura.'

'Do you?' said Laura.

There was a pause, and Roger wondered why she did not tell him that Jasmin's career was none of his business.

'Then there's something else I want to discuss with you,' he went on.

'Well, what is it?' said Laura. 'I'm packing, but if you want to go into it now I'll listen.'

'I don't want to go into it over the telephone—it's too complicated. Can't you meet me somewhere around five o'clock?'

There was a long pause, while Roger's heart annoyed him by thumping against his ribs and the telephone operator demanded another nickel. Finally Laura said slowly, 'All right—where'll it be? — Not here, because of Jasmin.'

'Make it the Waldorf. I'll be in the lobby at five.'

'Very well,' said Laura, and hung up. Roger stared at the brown walls of the telephone booth with the receiver still in his hand. Much as he loved his child—and he was genuinely worried about her future—it was not Jasmin he wanted to talk about. He wondered how Laura would feel if she knew that, for the last two days and nights, since the moment he had met her by accident at the Philharmonic with her mother, he had been haunted by her face and the sound of her voice and her infectious laughter, and all the things which had made him fall in love with her one day in Vinal Haven twenty-five years ago.



## *Chapter II*

JASMIN wandered up Madison Avenue. She had two hours in which to have her hair washed and her nails manicured, but she went toward her appointment reluctantly because she was not in the mood to be imprisoned under a dryer. She wanted to go back to the park and watch the small children sailing boats on the pond. She even had a wild desire to ride the carrousel, which made her laugh. Then she grew sober again, for beyond five o'clock lay bliss — and after that, oblivion.

She came out of the hairdresser's, feeling slightly better but not much. The ends of her hair had been waved so they curled under like a page-boy's and she had treated herself to a camomile rinse. More than one person turned to look at her as she walked up-town, for she was hatless and her pale blond hair was very striking. Jasmin, however, was unconscious of the attention she was getting. She was on her way to buy a hat. She knew it was silly of her to buy a new hat five hours before leaving for Maine, for it would spend the summer wrapped in tissue paper, but she refused to listen to the voice of common sense.

The hat was found almost immediately. It had a *chou* of flowers, a wisp of veiling, and a minimum of straw, and it was fantastically expensive. She would have exactly five dollars in the bank until the end of the month, but that seemed unimportant. Nothing mattered but the hat.

'Shall we send it, Miss?' asked the salesgirl.

'No,' said Jasmin, 'I'm wearing it. And you'll have to take a check, please, because I haven't enough money with me.'

The check was signed and delivered, and Jasmin walked out

into the spring sunlight. She could feel her heart pounding steadily in her throat. It was almost five o'clock. If she walked very, very slowly, she would get there a little after five. It would be indecent to arrive on time. She looked in the windows of the shops, and spoke to a friend who was wheeling a baby carriage, and admired a pair of cats in a pet-shop. She tried to appear unconcerned and normal, but once she caught sight of herself in a mirror in a furniture shop, and there was an unnatural flush on her cheeks.

'Dear me!' she thought, 'I must calm down. This won't do. I mustn't arrive in this condition.'

She walked faster after that, hoping that exercise would bring her down to normal and still the dreadful feeling of suspense and excitement which was brewing in her heart. But it was no use—as she turned into Sixty-Eighth Street, the palms of her hands were cold as ice.

She rang a bell and a little click-click answered her. Taking a deep breath, she opened the door and walked blandly up the stairs. She was glad that neither her mother nor father could see her, and she knew that if her grandmother suspected what she was doing she would have apoplexy. But she had no feeling of guilt herself, only a feeling of dread and suspense. She knocked shyly on the door, and it opened at once.

She had forgotten that he was so tall. He seemed to tower over her, and he was laughing down at her from a great distance. His hands were outstretched and she felt herself being pulled gently into the room. The door closed and they were alone.

'Jasmin! Jasmin! how good it is to see you!'

'Tony—!'

'Don't speak—just let me look at you! — You've had your hair done, and you've got a new hat. — And someone has given you a gardenia! I'm sorry, because I bought gardenias for you, too.'

‘Tony, Father bought me this.’ It was getting faded anyway. She took it off and laid it on the table. ‘You were sweet to think of buying me flowers!’

‘But why wouldn’t I buy you flowers?’ he returned with a laugh. ‘I chose gardenias because of your name.’

Cape jasmine . . . The other boys around town never remembered that. Only her father, and Tony, who scarcely knew her.

‘I didn’t know whether you wanted tea or cocktails,’ he went on, ‘so I have both ready. The daily char baked me a cake this morning, and it doesn’t look too frightful, and I’ve got a jar of paté somewhere. Do you like gin or rum cocktails?’

‘Gin,’ she replied, and then became speechless. He went into the tiny kitchenette and she heard him rattling cups and saucers. ‘I don’t want any tea,’ she said, omitting to explain that she had completely lost her appetite. Then she thought she ought to mention the cake because he had gone to some trouble about it. He came out bearing it in his hands. It was quite small, and as he said, it did not look too unappetizing. He cut her a piece, and she managed to eat most of it. He gave himself a piece twice as large, and she reflected that love never seemed to affect a man’s appetite. Then her eyes clouded and she thought, ‘He’s not really in love . . .’

‘Now let’s have a cocktail,’ he said, finishing the cake. ‘Do you like dry or sweet vermouth?’

‘Dry.’

‘I don’t suppose I should have you here while Mother’s away,’ he added as he hunted for the cocktail shaker. ‘I don’t know what people would think—but it seemed so much nicer than one of those damn bars.’

‘Yes, Tony, it’s all right.’

He looked down at her with a smile and put a handful of ice cubes in the shaker. ‘I don’t suppose it *is* all right. In Europe the thing—I mean people’s attitude—is a bit different.’

This gave Jasmin an opportunity to change the subject. ‘Tony,

last night you were telling me something about yourself, and then we were interrupted.'

'What do you want to know?'

'How long were you in Oxford?'

'Three years.'

'Magdalen, wasn't it?'

'No, Balliol.'

He was spreading anchovy paste on salted crackers. Jasmin felt she ought to help him, but she was rooted to the sofa. He finished the hors d'oeuvres and brought them to her. 'Thanks, Tony. — Why did you go to Oxford instead of Harvard? You were going to explain that too.'

'Mother was living in London,' he replied, 'and I thought I ought to be near her. — Is that anchovy paste all right? I've had it quite a while.'

'Yes, it's fine.'

'Mother's a lonely person in a way,' he explained. 'I wanted to go to college in America, but I couldn't leave her.'

'Is that your mother, over there on the desk?'

'Yes.' He took the photograph off the desk and handed it to her. 'This was taken in Paris several years ago. It's not very good, but it will give you some idea what she's like.'

Jasmin looked at the photograph in silence while Tony poured out the cocktails. She tried to find some resemblance between mother and son, but there was almost none. His mother's face was small and gay, with a short nose and a chin that looked determined and perhaps a little petulant. Her eyebrows were curved, and Jasmin noted they had been plucked. Tony's brows were thick and straight. She was laughing into the camera, and her mocking smile had no resemblance to Tony's infectious grin. She looked very *soignée* and very cosmopolitan. Jasmin was slightly nonplussed, for she had imagined Tony's mother to be suave and dignified, and here was someone who was neither.

'She's in Aiken now,' said Tony, 'but she'll be back next week. I want you to meet her.'

This was the moment for Jasmin to tell him that she would not be here next week, that she was leaving tonight for Maine. But the words would not come. She rested her head against the back of the sofa and looked at the ceiling, refusing to let anything spoil this, their last hour together for months and months. She could hear him moving around the room, setting things to rights, and finally she lowered her eyes and watched him. His face in repose had a sweetness about it that made her heart stop for a moment, and although he was very young, there was a certain maturity in his expression which she hadn't found in other men of her own age. Europe, she supposed, had something to do with it.

He turned and caught her eyes upon him and smiled.

Jasmin answered his smile and looked out of the window where the afternoon sunlight was still bright and warm. Her feeling of contentment was bitter-sweet, because it wasn't going to last. In three hours she would be on the train.

'Jasmin . . .'

'What is it, Tony?'

'Let's go to a show on Monday. I'd like to see a musical comedy. Or would you rather go to a play?'

There was a long pause. He lit a cigarette and turned to her. 'What about it, kid?'

Jasmin sat up and clasped her hands around her knees. She tried to appear unconcerned, for it would be stupid to let him see how she felt. She must take it lightly while she was with him.

'Tony,' she said with a smile, 'I've got a confession to make. I don't know why I didn't tell you before. I meant to last night, but we were so busy talking about other things . . .'

'Well, what is it?' he said as she paused.

'I'm going to Maine tonight at nine o'clock.'

There, it was out! She relaxed against the sofa.

'God!' said Tony with feeling.

He sat down beside her on the sofa and drank the rest of his cocktail, and stared thoughtfully at the other side of the room.

'Jasmin,' he said, 'you should have told me this before.'

'There was nothing *you* could do about it,' she replied.

'I suppose not . . . Do you really have to go tonight?'

'Yes, I'm afraid so.'

'Why? — isn't this rather early in the season to go to Maine?  
It must be awfully cold up there.'

'I'll have to chaperone Mother and Uncle Sandy.'

'Who's "Uncle Sandy"?"

'Alexander Boyne.'

The name meant nothing to Tony. He said, 'Couldn't she get somebody else to chaperone her? What about your grandmother?'

'Gran hates the cold weather.'

'Well, I can't say that I blame her,' murmured Tony. He reached for the cocktail shaker and poured out a dividend. 'This is mostly ice,' he added. 'I'll make another one in a minute.  
— How long do you think you'll be gone?'

This was the real question, the most pregnant one, the question Jasmin had been dreading. She lifted her cocktail glass and looked into the pale amber liquid instead of looking at Tony, because she was afraid her eyes would betray her gloom.

'All summer,' she replied. 'That's the trouble.'

'All summer — !' echoed Tony in dismay. 'You can't do that!'

'I'm afraid I'll have to. I'll see you in the fall when I get back.'

He set down his cocktail glass and rose to his feet with a frown. He crossed the room twice before he spoke again, and she was ridiculously happy because he was so upset. She was unprepared, however, for what came next.

'Fall's no good,' he said. 'I won't be here.'

'You mean you'll be in Cambridge. But I can come to Boston.' He hesitated, jingling the keys and the small change in his pocket. Then he said slowly, 'I'm not going to Law School. I'm going into the Navy. Nobody knows it yet; I haven't even told Mother.'

Jasmin grew very pale. Tony had been in England when the war broke out. There was no use arguing with him because he had seen it at first hand. And she knew that it was impossible for America to stay out of the war, and that he was doing the right thing, but it meant the end of this.

'Where will you be in Maine?' he asked, pausing in front of her.

'Up in the mountains — a place called Winnebago. I told you about it last night.'

'That's right, you did.' Tony hesitated, searching his mind for something which was eluding him. 'Mother has a camp somewhere in Maine. She never mentions it, and I've forgotten the name of the place. She won't go there because she hates the woods.'

'I doubt if it's anywhere near ours — we're in the middle of nowhere,' said Jasmin.

Tony crossed the room. 'Couldn't I come and see you?' he said diffidently. 'I might fly up there for the week-end, or something.'

'There isn't an air-field within a hundred miles of us,' replied Jasmin. 'You'd have to take a train, and then a bus, and then hire a car to drive the last fifteen miles. It takes forever.'

'Sounds difficult,' he admitted. A fleeting grin passed over his face as he added, '— And *you* sound as though you didn't want me. You're not very enthusiastic.'

'I do want you,' she said quietly.

'Then is there any reason why I couldn't come?'

'No.'

He sat down beside her and mixed another cocktail. Jasmin

looked at her watch. It was after six o'clock, and in a few minutes she would have to leave him. She was afraid to let herself dwell on the promise of seeing him in camp; there was every possibility that he would change his mind or something would happen before he got there.

'You may not like it,' she warned. 'Besides the black flies, there are the porcupines which keep you awake all night, and loons which do the same thing, and the days are awfully long and dull unless you are really crazy about fishing.'

Tony replied that he was. 'A fellow I knew in college owned a small stream in Hampshire, and we used to go down there every week-end. But unfortunately I left all my tackle in Oxford, like a damn fool. I don't suppose I'll ever see it again.'

'We have plenty of rods,' said Jasmin.

'Then you will ask me up—soon?'

'Yes, Tony.'

He put down his half-empty glass and took her hands in his. She knew that he wanted to kiss her, but she held back. 'Jasmin . . . oh, Jasmin!' he murmured.

'Tony, I have to go now,' she said, trying to release her hands.

'I know what you're thinking,' he went on, '—you're thinking about last night. I'm sorry! Looking back on it, I realize I behaved very badly. I half expected you to call up and say you weren't coming this afternoon.'

'Don't worry,' said Jasmin. 'Only—only it was a little unexpected, I must admit.'

'The worst part of it,' he added, 'was the fact that I hadn't had enough to drink to make me that way. There was simply no excuse for it. I usually reserve those tactics for *les girls*,' he added with a rueful grin.

Jasmin laughed in return, and he was reassured. He drew her into his arms and kissed her gently at first, then with more passion. Jasmin did not respond, because she was afraid that if she did he would know how much she cared about him. But

finally toward the end she couldn't resist him any longer, lost her head, and kissed him.

'Well, anyway,' she thought as she pulled herself hurriedly out of his arms, 'I've had something — something I can remember all the time I'm in Maine. I'll have to look at it that way and forget the rest.'

'Jasmin,' said Tony quietly, 'how old are you?'

She hesitated, and the color came and went in her face. 'I'm twenty-four,' she replied uneasily. '— I'm older than you are.'

'So I supposed. Do you feel that I'm extremely young, or not?'

'No, I never think of it. You're older, anyway — I mean, you're more mature — than most of the boys I know.'

'Give me another kiss!'

'Tony, I have to go!' she protested. 'We're having dinner at seven o'clock.'

He kissed her on the mouth, and she picked up her new hat and put it on, and found her purse and gloves, and they went toward the door. He held her hand in a silent good-bye, and then suddenly she was out in the hall alone, going down the stairs with her heart beating and her limbs weak. When she came out into the street, it seemed to be aflame with late afternoon sunlight. She paused, getting her bearings and thinking, 'Yes, it's lovely. It was wonderful, but it wasn't real. He doesn't love me, and there's no use kidding myself that he does. — Good-bye, Tony! Maybe I'll see you again, and maybe I won't.'

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## *Chapter III*

**W**HEN Jasmin arrived home she found the hall littered with paper cartons, duffel bags, rod cases, steamer rugs, and a variety of ancient hand luggage which all looked familiar. The eve of departure was always the same. The hall was filled not only with luggage but suspense. There was an electric quality in the air which never happened on any other night of the year, not even on Christmas Eve. But for the first time in her life Jasmin failed to respond to it in quite the same way. She looked at the hall sadly, thinking what it meant.

The dog was wandering mournfully around the hall and sniffing at the bags. Roddy was always sure he was going to be left behind. He was supposedly a bird dog, but although his mother had been an excellent spaniel, he had none of her talents, her intelligence, nor her steady temperament. In the woods he was almost hopeless, and Jasmin was the only one who ever tried to use him. However, he was a nice house dog.

Jasmin hunted through the apartment until she found her mother. Laura was aimlessly wrapping things in tissue paper, and if Jasmin had not been so preoccupied with her own affairs, she would have noticed that she was slightly flushed. Jasmin pushed aside some things on the bed and sat down.

'Are you packed yet?' asked Laura.

'More or less.'

'Where have you been all afternoon?'

Laura put the question absently while she hunted for a missing shoe.

'Well, I had lunch with Father,' answered Jasmin evasively, hoping that her mother was not going to question her too closely.

'That's right, this was the day, wasn't it,' said Laura mendaciously. She found the other shoe and wrapped it neatly in tissue paper, and then threw it carelessly into a suitcase. She did not look at Jasmin.

'I thought he seemed very well,' added Jasmin. 'He's got a sunburn, which is very attractive, and a few more gray hairs.'

Laura felt that she ought to make some comment. 'How long did he say he was going to be in New York?' she inquired idly, gazing into the suitcase.

'Oh, he's going to live here from now on—he's been transferred from the Washington office.' Roger was vice-president of a bank which had branches in South America, Europe, and the Far East, and he had spent most of the past twenty years abroad. 'I wish I could have seen more of him before I went to Maine,' added Jasmin. 'It's a pity—'

'What's a pity?' asked Laura, closing the suitcase.

'Nothing,' said Jasmin, losing courage. If she said it was a pity she had to go to Maine, her mother would think it was so odd she would wonder and then grow suspicious. Her passion for Maine was well known. Like her mother, she always referred to it as 'home.'

Laura attacked another suitcase. She was thinking about the trip ahead of her, the long journey, the final separation from any temptation. But she told herself again warmly that what she was doing was the sensible thing. She was still upset from the hour she had spent with Roger. She had gone to meet him in her usual spirit of defiance, which had suffered when she saw how nicely the years had treated him; and to make matters worse, instead of arguing with her about Jasmin, she had found him pliant, agreeable, and regrettably charming.

He was charming still, but she was sure that his years of bachelorhood had made him excessively spoiled, for he was not

only good-looking, but had a certain wistful quality about him which made him hopelessly attractive to women.

Laura wondered in passing, with a dull sensation of pain, how many women he had had during the past twenty years, and what they were like, and who they were. She had often wondered why he had never married again, and she was about to put the question to him with unusual frankness over their second cocktail when he said suddenly that he thought Jasmin was in love.

Laura looked surprised, and said, 'Oh, no, I don't think so.'

'Well, you know her better than I do,' said Roger, 'but she's right under your nose all the time and you may not have noticed the change in her. I thought she looked — how shall I say it? — sweeter and warmer. She also looked distracted.'

Laura would have been horrified if she had realized how distracted she was herself. She crumpled the tissue paper in her hands and stuffed it into the corners of the suitcase.

While she was brooding the doorbell rang. 'There's Uncle Sandy,' said Jasmin.

'Go let him in,' said Laura, 'and tell Jennie to bring the cocktail tray. There's some more of that turkey paste — we might as well use it up.'

Jasmin opened the door, and Sandy and his luggage were added to the confusion in the hall. He was clothed in an old Harris tweed suit, and already it seemed to smell of balsam and fir and wood-smoke.

'Hello, darling,' said Jasmin, trying to be natural with him, although he was the unconscious cause of most of her woes.

Sandy kissed her and asked where Laura was.

'She's in her room, packing. What do you want to drink?'

'An old-fashioned, I guess. I wonder whether your mother was able to get any jungle-cock feathers.'

'Yes, but I think she had to pay a fortune for them.'

Sandy followed her into the pantry. ‘You know, I think this idea of going up the minute the ice is out is all wrong. I don’t think the fishing’s ever much good until the water warms up a bit — say a week after the lake is clear.’

‘I know, but you can’t tell Mother that. She’s made up her mind she wants to go smelt fishing.’

‘It’s a horrid sport. You get all wet and half frozen. And Laura always said so. What happened to her?’

‘It’s a whim,’ said Jasmin, preceding him into the living-room with the appetizers.

‘Not that I mind going,’ added Sandy, ‘but I just couldn’t see why she wanted to leave in such a hurry.’

The doorbell rang again. Jasmin let the maid answer it. There was a murmur of voices in the hall, and then her grandmother walked into the room. ‘Hello, hello,’ she said. ‘Where’s Laura?’

‘Packing,’ answered Jasmin. ‘What’ll you have to drink, Gran?’

‘Dear me!’ said Mrs. Emery, taking off her gloves, ‘— drinking again! I’ll have some Bourbon.’

Jasmin went to find the Bourbon, and Sandy said, ‘I’m sorry you’re not going with us tonight, Mrs. Emery.’

Mrs. Emery shivered. ‘It’s too cold this time of year. It was all right when I was younger. I had Laurence in bed with me. But when you sleep alone you get so cold. I tried flannel sheets, but it wasn’t the same.’

‘I must admit,’ said Sandy, ‘that it’s apt to be uncomfortable when you go up as early as this. But Laura — ’

‘Especially,’ added Mrs. Emery, ‘when the pipes freeze. In Laurence’s father’s day they didn’t have pipes — much simpler. They had the old earth-closet out behind the ice-house, and we all bathed in one of those English tin tubs. When I came there as a bride we didn’t have any comforts at all.’

‘But you thought it was a thrilling adventure,’ annotated Sandy.

'No, I didn't. I thought it was perfectly dreadful. I cried and cried. Laurence was simply darling, but he went fishing just the same.'

Jasmin came in with the Bourbon and mixed her grandmother a drink.

'Not too much, darling!' said Mrs. Emery. '—My mother-in-law gave me some sane advice. I called a rod a "pole," and I didn't know the difference between a trout and a salmon. She told me I'd better learn how. She said that of course in her day they didn't, but we had bicycles and things. —Call Laura, Jasmin! She's going to miss the train.'

'No, she's not, Gran. We've got hours yet—it's only seven o'clock.'

'But the train,' said Mrs. Emery positively, 'leaves at eight.'

'No, it doesn't, Gran, it leaves at *nine*.'

'Are you sure?' said Mrs. Emery. 'I don't think it does.—Sandy, look and see what it says on your ticket.'

'I'm sure it leaves at nine,' said Sandy, taking out his wallet.

'There!' said Mrs. Emery, '—just as I thought! It says *eight* o'clock.'

'But that's *eight* o'clock standard time—or is it?' said Jasmin, with a feeling of doubt.

'It's *eight* o'clock Eastern Standard Time,' said Sandy patiently. 'If you remember, we had the same argument last year.'

'Does it say standard time on the ticket?' asked Jasmin.

'No, it doesn't, but—'

'I wish you'd call them up, Sandy. We don't want to miss the train.' That's not true in my case, thought Jasmin unhappily. She wondered what Tony was doing now. She had a vague idea he had a dinner engagement. The thought of Tony dancing with some other girl at the St. Regis or the Plaza was enough to make her lapse into a deep silence. Mrs. Emery and Sandy continued the argument, which was terminated by Laura, who said

flatly it was nine o'clock, because she had been doubtful herself this afternoon and had called the station.

'We have this argument every year,' she added, '— every year for forty-odd years. You'd think we'd know what time the State of Maine Express leaves, wouldn't you?'

'In the old days it didn't leave at nine o'clock,' said Mrs. Emery. 'It left at eight or ten, I can't remember which.'

'Oh, my God!' said Sandy with amusement.

'Yes, Mother,' said Laura, 'let's change the subject. — Sandy, I brought you some feathers.'

'So I hear. How much do I owe you?'

'Plenty. I think I bought the last in New York. No more streamer flies made with pure jungle cock. These will have to last you for the duration.'

'— That's another thing,' said Mrs. Emery warmly. 'I used to object to the expense. When we went to England, Laurence always bought fishing tackle, the most expensive kind. I wanted a tweed suit, but Laurence bought a rod. And I wanted a hat, and he bought two dozen leaders. And so it went. — My mother-in-law said it was a cross she'd borne for years. I said I was more emancipated and was going to put a stop to it, but I never could.'

Laura said in protest, 'Mother, you sound exactly as though you and Father were always miserable.'

'Yes, Gran,' said Jasmin, coming out of her reverie, 'I seem to remember one or two expensive pieces of fishing tackle you've bought yourself from time to time.'

'That was different,' retorted Mrs. Emery.

Sandy laughed and poured himself another drink. He settled back into the sofa with a contented feeling. Listening to Mrs. Emery's voice, he could almost believe that life had not changed, and that nothing could ever change it. The evening paper was lying beside him on the sofa, but he was sure that none of them

had glanced at the headlines. They were going to Maine—that was enough. It was perhaps the last time they would ever go there with any feeling of comfort or security, and they would keep up the fiction that nothing could stop them, until the end.

'How pensive our Sandy is!' said Laura.

Sandy smiled, but did not tell her what he was thinking.

After dinner there was an interval during which everyone became flurried and irritable. Over the confusion rose Mrs. Emery's voice, telling them to hurry or they would surely miss the train. Roddy's muzzle had vanished, and Jasmin was frightened because they would not allow him in the baggage car without one, and Laura had mislaid a package of books.

'It does seem to me,' said Mrs. Emery, 'that you could have been ready in time, Laura. All this could have been done this afternoon.'

'I was out,' replied Laura briefly.

'So was I,' said Jasmin.

Mrs. Emery was annoyed with them. 'I do hate drama like this—it makes me frightfully nervous—and now I shall have indigestion. I don't see why either of you had to go out. *I* never do.—There's Roddy's muzzle—there, under the chair.'

Sandy knelt down and buckled it, but Roddy immediately took it off.

'He does that,' said Jasmin in passing. 'Never mind—they don't care just as long as he has one. —I'm going ahead in the first taxi because I have to check him.'

There was an immediate protest from her grandmother, who said it was a wild idea for them to go in separate taxis. Laura settled the argument by saying there wasn't room enough for them in one taxi, and Jasmin went off laden with a rod case and Roddy's dog biscuits. As the door closed behind her, Mrs. Emery said she looked pale, and what was the matter?

'I don't know,' said Laura, 'she's got something on her mind, but she won't tell me what it is.'

'Love, probably,' said Sandy.

Laura looked at him in surprise. Roger had said the same thing. Was it possible that the men were more astute than she was? Jasmin *did* look pale, unusually so. Jasmin, an hour before train time, was always in a mood of suppressed excitement with her eyes bright and her cheeks pink.

'Never mind, now!' said Sandy. 'Hurry up, Laura, or we *will* miss the train.'

Laura kissed her mother hurriedly and followed Sandy to the door. Now that the moment had come she could hardly believe that it had happened again. Another year was over and she was about to begin a new one. During that twelve months a lot of things could happen, but she was not going to let herself think about them now. The future, she decided, thinking in clichés, could take care of itself.

## *Chapter IV*

THE TRAIN rumbled on through the night, making interminable halts at New Haven and Worcester. From time to time a baby cried fitfully and a man snored. The sleeper, as usual, smelled of rancid coal smoke and steam and disinfectant, but it was a lovely smell to Jasmin because of its associations. Lying awake, she thought of the years when this trip had been the overture to the real business of living. She remembered the excitement which used to clutch at her childish heart like a tiger, the almost unbearable pleasure of knowing that you were passing through Willimantic and Worcester and Dover and Portsmouth, and soon you would be in the Portland station, which was the beginning of the most delectable part of the journey. But tonight there was only a mournful nostalgia in raising the shade and looking at the dark buildings in Worcester.

“To be old is not to care,” thought Jasmin wryly.

The train was creeping on toward morning; in another three hours they would be in Portland. Tony was probably sleeping, and the girl he had taken out that evening was putting cold cream on her face and remembering how divinely he waltzed and what fun he was to be with.

‘I shouldn’t have left,’ thought Jasmin with a sick feeling. ‘If I’d been sensible I’d have done everything I could to make Mother let me stay at home. I could have told her that Father wanted me. Perhaps someone — maybe Gran — ought to have known the truth.

‘But then,’ she added with the cynicism born of experience,

'Tony might have grown bored with me, and I'd have been stuck in New York for the whole summer. Maybe there's some reason for all this—some plan.'

This philosophy acted like a sedative, and she drifted into a fitful sleep. When she opened her eyes, she realized that dawn had come because there was a crack of light under the window shade. She pushed it up and looked out, and for a moment all her unhappiness dropped away, and she was a child again, thrilled with the first pine tree, the little white farm perched on top of the hill, the brook wandering through a sedgy field. She knew they had left New Hampshire and were in Maine, for there was an unmistakable look about the countryside. 'Home! . . .' she thought broodingly. The old lines which she had always murmured to herself when she put up the shade formed in her mind now: 'Breathes there the man with soul so dead, Who never to himself hath said, This is my own, my native land.'

She felt like weeping because her emotions were so muddled this morning; she was being unfaithful; one love was destroying the other.

Jasmin pulled the shade down again to shut out the pink sky and the dark shadow of the pines, and lay there telling herself that she was being much too emotional. The porter was beginning to wake the occupants of the car. She could hear his soft voice saying, 'Five-thirty, ma'am.' The baby woke up and started to cry again, and she could hear Sandy moving in the next berth. A man yawned, and there was a creaking sound as someone climbed out of an upper berth. She could hear all these sounds because the train had stopped at Kennebunk.

'Jasmin!' said her mother's voice, 'get up!'

Jasmin yawned, and with a practiced hand, because she had been doing it for years and years, pulled on her girdle without moving from the berth. When she was fully dressed, she went out and found Sandy standing on the platform looking at the woods. Both of them stood there gazing at the passing country.

The woods dissolved into long flat meadows bisected with muddy creeks. The sea was encroaching upon the arable land, and there were gulls in the sky and sandpipers on the gray mud.

‘We’re almost there,’ said Sandy.

Laura came through the car in search of them. ‘We’re late, so that means we’ll have only fifteen minutes for breakfast.’

Jasmin was looking at the oil tanks and bridges of South Portland with her mind on Tony. She had no appetite for breakfast.

The station was full of cheerful noise, and men in tweed over-coats with rods in canvas cases, and the smell of doughnuts and coffee. Jasmin fed Roddy some biscuits and drank a cup of tea. She looked around the small station dining-room, remembering how large it had been before people motored up to Maine instead of going by train. She remembered the big colored photographs of the Samoset and the Rangeley Lake House and the oval counters with steaming urns of coffee and the huge pile of griddle cakes on her plate. Through these old memories moved her grandfather, white-haired, distinguished, shepherding his women into the dining-room, fussing over the little details of the breakfast, which always seemed to be less hurried in those days. The big dining-room, even at breakfast time, always smelled faintly of lobster and steamed clams. The only thing remaining from the old days was Johnny, the porter. He came toward them now, grinning.

‘I got you all fixed up. The train’s on track one.—How’s Mrs. Emery keepin’ herself?’

‘She’s fine,’ replied Laura. ‘You’re looking pretty well yourself, Johnny.’

‘Oh, I’m not doin’ so bad. — And Miss Jasmin, here—she’s lookin’ well, too.’

‘It’s good to see you, Johnny!’ said Jasmin, with a smile.

It *was* good to see him, because he was part of the lovely, indestructible past.

Jasmin went out to the train leading Roddy. There was a moment when she paused by the news-stand, gazing thoughtfully at the post-cards and wondering whether it would be sensible or indiscreet to send a line to Tony. She decided that it would be rather silly, and went across the tracks to the waiting train. Roddy made a protest at being put in another baggage car and she gave him some more biscuits. Laura and Sandy were already in their seats reading the *Boston Herald* and the *Portland Press-Herald*. The war news was bad that morning and neither of them spoke. Jasmin sat down behind them, having first made sure that her rod case would not roll into the aisle when the train rounded a curve. A man came into the coach and sat down beside a plump woman in a shiny straw hat. They began to talk, and their voices rose above the hiss of steam and the rumble of the baggage trucks on the platform outside. Jasmin closed her eyes and listened to the familiar, clipped accents of Maine, and the past seemed to flow over her and take possession. This was her life—her real life—and the other was all a dream. Even Tony receded into the middle distance; her life in New York, her singing lessons, her friends, the dinner parties and the evenings at Larue's, were only a background with figures, a picture with no meaning.

The train gave a jolt, and a moment later they were under way. The gardens in Cumberland Center were full of new green, and the rolling fields toward Gray were dark with early plowing or bright with winter wheat. They crossed a bridge, and the water under it was cold and brown, with the patine of old mahogany. At Gray the countryside was so lovely that it was almost unbearable; there was a grassy hill rolling sharply down to a stream, a cluster of pines, and wild mint growing at the edge of the water. Sheep were grazing on the hill among flat, dark green bouquets of ground hemlock, under a pale blue sky, and there was a patch of innocence growing on the hill near the pines. Then the train gave a hiss and rumbled on.

Jasmin had no desire to read, although Sandy politely offered her half of the *Herald*. She sat quietly beside the window with her chin cupped in her hand, enthralled with the passing woods and fields. Each familiar landmark had its own charm; you loved the way the stream curved under a clump of drooping elms, the small white house standing on top of a green hill, the forgotten lilacs flourishing in a lonely pasture. Maine seemed achingly beautiful today, and she knew why. Although Tony had no place in this familiar landscape, the quality which she had gained from loving him was there, setting each hill, each cold little brook in sharp relief. Doubtless when love was over, you lost your sensitivity again, and the woods and fields, although still lovely, became mundane.

Jasmin turned her head away from the window and looked at her mother. Some article in the paper had made her indignant, and she was holding forth with her usual vigor while Sandy listened and made a brief comment from time to time. Jasmin wondered if anything definite would come of this trip to Maine, whether her mother would finally make up her mind to marry him. In a way, it would be a good thing. They liked each other; they were very companionable . . . But Jasmin doubted if her mother's vision was any sharper than usual this morning. Although she was devoted to Sandy, she was not deeply in love with him.

The news-butcher came through the train with his basket. Sandy turned his head and looked at Jasmin. 'Shall I buy you some Bangor taffy, darling?'

Jasmin laughed, because in the old days there was always a battle with her mother whether she was to eat it *before* Lewiston or *after*. Sandy bought three boxes and tossed them into her lap, and Jasmin made the comment that it wouldn't matter when she ate her taffy, and it was a very sad thing to grow old and have a flawless digestion. Then she retired again into her thoughts.

Her mother had had a lot of serious beaux in the past, but none of them had lasted as long or had been as patient as Sandy — poor Sandy. He was always there in the background, waiting. He saw her mother's affairs blossom and die, and with infinite tact he would pick up what remained of her emotions and put them together again with affection and understanding. Jasmin was sometimes dismayed with the way her mother took Sandy for granted, and it wasn't because her mother was a flirt or anything like that. She was really devoted to him, but something always held her back. Jasmin could not understand why her mother hesitated at her age. Everyone liked Sandy, he was a good fisherman, and he had a solid income, inherited from an aunt in Boston. He was also gifted with a sense of humor, and he was good-looking in a mild sort of way. He would be an attractive stepfather . . .

Sandy turned his head again and caught her eye on him. 'Now, what?' he exclaimed.

'I was thinking,' replied Jasmin calmly.

'That, sweetheart, was obvious.'

'Jasmin, why don't you read a book or something?' added Laura uneasily.

'I'd rather look out of the window. It's wonderful — you're missing a lot.'

'Yes, but you weren't looking out of the window,' said Sandy, 'you were looking at me. I can't see what pleasure you were getting from staring at the back of my head. — Let's play gin-rummy,' he added, feeling that Jasmin ought to be amused because she looked broody.

'It's too early in the morning for gin-rummy, thank you just the same.'

'We're going to have to change cars in a minute, anyway,' said Laura. 'How I do hate all these frightful changes you have to make this time of year.'

'Yes, darling, they couldn't be more difficult,' said Sandy, 'but

this was all your idea, remember. We didn't want to leave as early as this — did we, Jasmin? — Will you tell me now why you had to go to Maine this week? I still can't see why you had this sudden brainstorm.'

'I told you,' replied Laura, 'I wanted to go smelt fishing. I haven't been in years. — Come on, here's Rumford Junction!'

They changed cars in a flurry of confusion, for there seemed to be an enormous amount of luggage. Roddy howled pitifully as he was transferred from one baggage car to another, and Jasmin was unhappy about him. She collapsed breathlessly into her seat as the train started to move. The day-coach was old and smelled of peanuts and root-beer and dust. The landscape began to change subtly. The farmhouses were still white and clean, and the rolling fields were all under cultivation, but there was a more rugged quality in the woods and the stream turned into a charging river which ran merrily, in full spate, between cliffs and boulders and dark, overhanging firs. The young leaves on the trees grew smaller and smaller, and the vegetables in the gardens beside every house were barely above ground. The train began to climb, and Jasmin could hear the engine puffing and choking as it wound its way through woods and lonely pasture land. She looked out eagerly, waiting for the first mountain. The train rounded a curve, and there it was, cold and austere and remote against a pallid blue sky.

It gave her such a deep feeling of happiness when she saw it that she wanted to reach out her hand to Tony, bring him into the present, and show him how lovely her country was in the midst of a northern spring. There was something so marvelously chaste and pure about the cold blue mountains, the pale birches, and the icy brooks. How could she ever convey the excitement of this in words, or by writing? And she wanted him to know what it was like because it was so much a part of her. She could never marry, or love deeply, any man who did not feel the same

way she did about the stark mountains against the sky or the golden leaves dripping from the birches in early fall, or the thousand other things which bound her to this country more than to any other place in the world.

She wished now that she had brought him with her, had suggested that he come now instead of later; for if he did not react to it in the way she wanted, she would know that love wasn't really possible between them. She couldn't give this up for any man living — not entirely.

Her mother's voice penetrated her consciousness. 'This train is getting awfully chilly! — Jasmin, are you dressed warmly enough?'

'Yes, Mother,' said Jasmin, who had not noticed the air in the coach. 'I feel perfectly comfortable.'

'Your circulation must be marvelous. I'm freezing,' said Laura. She caught a look in Sandy's eye and added rapidly, 'Now, I know just what you're going to say, but don't say it! I had my reasons.'

It was getting colder and colder outside, and when they got off the train in Farmington the air would be thin and fresh . . . And the wind on the lake would be as sharp as a knife, and there would be patches of melting snow in the woods. She wondered whether Tony would have gotten the same heady thrill from it, or whether he would have felt cold and miserable . . .

'We'll be in Farmington in half an hour, thank goodness,' said Laura.

'Then we have the bus ride,' said Sandy.

'Yes, and then the long drive home. But I'm not complaining about the trip. I know you think I am, but I'm not. It's creeping over me, Sandy. Ever since I saw that mountain back there I've been terribly happy. — I'm coming *home!* — When I was younger I was more articulate about it. As I grow older it seems

harder to express my emotions, but I trust you understand how I feel.'

Sandy smiled in reply. He wondered if she understood that he himself, in a sense, was coming home. He was going to a place where spiritually, though not actually, he belonged.

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## *Chapter V*

THE WIND was blowing out of the north and the lake was full of miniature whitecaps. There was a patch of snow on South Mountain, and there were no leaves whatever on the trees, but spring was stirring in them, for the shoreline was a soft burnt umber. A thin veil of smoke hung over a point at the other end of the lake, and Jasmin thought, 'Camp will be warm and cozy and we'll have hot toddies before lunch.'

Bert and Walter were stowing the luggage into the boats, and Sandy was having an animated conversation with Willie Tinker, who owned the sporting camp at the end of the lake. Willie's clipped accents rose over the splash of the waves; he said something amusing, and Sandy laughed. Laura was shivering at the end of the wharf and Jasmin joined her.

'As usual,' she remarked to her mother, 'I can't believe I've been away.'

'Neither can I,' replied Laura. 'I feel as though we'd left camp yesterday. — I do hope Loretta remembered to air the blankets — you know how she is!'

After that the conversation between them died. They looked across the rough lake in silence, enjoying it to the full. The waves were dashing against the rocky shore, throwing spray into the overhanging firs and birches, and to the left, crushed against the mouth of the outlet, was a bank of dirty gray ice. A lonely fisherman was throwing a fly into the teeth of the wind, and a pair of sheldrakes were flying low across the choppy water, almost touching it with their wings. There was a strong fragrance of

pine and balsam and running sap in the air, and you could smell the water, too, fresh and clean and bitter cold.

Bert called to them. ‘We’re all set, now. I’ve got all the stuff in one boat, and you can start ahead in the other one.’

Jasmin and Laura walked back along the wharf. The old guide held the boat while they climbed into it, and Jasmin noticed with a pang that his hands were getting leathery and gnarled with age. He seemed thinner, too, under his black rubber raincoat. His mustache was more unkempt than ever and there were tired lines around his eyes. Jasmin lay down in the bow, leaving the two middle seats for her mother and Sandy, and Bert climbed heavily into the stern.

Willie Tinker remarked that the boat was loaded to the gunwales and they were all going to get wet. Laura replied that she was too lazy to open her duffel bag and get out her raincoat, but the last part of the sentence was drowned in the whine of the outboard. They headed up into the wind, and Jasmin could feel the water slapping under her against the sides of the boat. The air was full of cold spray, and Laura shouted to Bert that he was going too fast. Bert reduced the speed of the outboard, and remarked that it would have been a good idea if Laura had worn something more substantial than what she had on. He called her by her first name, for he had known her forty-odd years. Laura retorted something which was lost in the wind.

The boat was pounding at longer intervals now and their progress up the lake was slow and wet. Jasmin relaxed in the bottom of the boat and looked up at the pale blue sky. Every once in a while the spray came over green, but she had on an old tweed suit which nothing could hurt. She took off her English felt hat, however, and stowed it under the seat, letting the wind and the spray ravish the wave in her hair. It was a relief not to care how you looked, to be unkempt and dowdy if you pleased, and smell of fish and engine grease, and to be able to take the polish off your nails. A smile crossed her face; this

time yesterday she was in the Ritz, musing over the wonderful hat she was going to buy after lunch, and hang the expense.

Bert nosed the boat inshore, on the theory that there was a slight lee from a point of land farther up the lake. Jasmin could see brown leaves under the trees, the black hips on the alders, a clump of trillium not yet in bloom. The woods were thin and leafless, and the visibility was so good that she could see the Dwight camp plainly as they moved slowly past it. The camp was ordinarily hidden by an untidy clump of alders, but they were not yet in leaf. It was lonely and unattractive; there was a patch of melting snow beside the front steps, and the railing around the porch was broken in places. Jasmin called her mother's attention to the deserted house.

'Did you ever see anything so dreary? Why don't they fix it up?'

'I suppose they've lost interest,' replied Laura briefly over the whine of the motor.

'—Or why don't they rent it to someone, if they can't be bothered to do it themselves?'

'That, my dear, is something I've never understood,' replied Laura, avoiding Sandy's eyes.

'They were rather queer ducks, weren't they?'

'Oh, no,' said Laura, 'they weren't queer.'

Sandy changed the subject.

'There's a loon!' he said, pointing.

'They've been nestin' around here somewhere,' said Bert loudly. 'Jasmin, you better see if you can find the nest.'

'What would I do with it if I found it?' replied Jasmin. 'I'm past the age where I'm interested in raising loons.'

She was unaware that everybody was trying to change the subject. She looked back at the Dwight camp until a point hid it from view, pondering the strange habits of a family who could go away for twenty years and not care what happened to a house which had once had charm.

Bert shut off the motor and the boat drifted in to the float. Loretta, Walter's wife, came running down the path in a white apron, her graying hair blown by the wind. She was engaged by Laura spring and fall to do the housework in the camp, for Jennie flatly refused to go to Maine until the weather was what she called decent. Laura meekly let Jennie do as she pleased, for she was old and faithful. Laura greeted Loretta by asking if she had remembered to air the blankets.

'Oh, yes, dear!' said Loretta, 'and all the beds are made up. The camp's nice and warm, only there was a nest of swallows in the dinin'-room chimney and we couldn't light the fire in there until this mornin', so the dinin'-room's damper'n the rest.  
— My, Jasmin, ain't you grown thin!'

'Thin! — I didn't know I was thin,' said Jasmin in surprise, wondering if she had lost any weight over Tony.

'— And there's Roddy!' continued Loretta in a cooing voice. 'Well, Roddy! Did he know his old Loretta? He was an old sweetheart, he was!'

'That,' murmured Sandy, looking at Loretta, 'is one of the reasons why Roddy was never a good bird dog.'

They left the guides and Loretta to struggle with the boatful of luggage and walked up the path. The large, rambling house was made of peeled logs with a porch running around three sides of it. Laura's father had given it to her as a wedding present, and the guides in the village had built it. There was a place under the eaves where the men had carved their initials on the logs, with the date of Laura's marriage to Roger. The roof had been reshingled during the winter, and Laura looked at it anxiously, hoping that the shingles were as fireproof as the mail-order catalogue claimed they were. She had paid a lot of money for the shingles.

Then she opened the door and went in, and as she crossed the threshold a warm tide of feeling rushed over her. Nothing had changed; the camp looked just the way it had for twenty-five

years. Even Roger's chair was there by the fire. She wondered why she had never given it away. And his old twenty-gauge gun was hanging over the door which led into the dining-room; but the gun had a reason for being there because Jasmin used it.

'Do you know if there's any liquor in the house?' asked Sandy.

'Must be,' replied Laura. 'Try the sideboard.'

'Lemons,' said Jasmin; 'we ought to have some lemons.—Oh, God, I'm cold!'

Jasmin went into the kitchen and came back with three lemons and a sharp knife. Sandy found the Bourbon and between them they concocted a toddy. Laura took off her coat, which was damp with spray, and hung it on the fire-screen to dry. She knew that her feet were wet, too, but she was too cold to do anything about it. The fire was roaring up the chimney and she spread her hands in front of it with a shudder. She could hear the wind dashing the water against the shore. It was cold, bitterly cold, but she was glad to be home. Sandy said something to her and she turned with a smile. He handed her the steaming toddy, and their eyes met.

'Sandy, darling, are you really sorry you came?'

'No, of course not! — Laura, drink that, or you'll have pneumonia.'

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## *Chapter VI*

WITH the approach of evening the wind died and the air grew a little warmer. Jasmin, who had been unpacking in a desultory fashion all afternoon, suddenly decided to go fishing. She was tired of the house. She put on a pair of dungarees and an old mackinaw, took her fly-rod and the canvas creel in which she kept her tackle, and went down to the float. On the other side of the lake she could see Sandy and Walter rowing slowly along the shore in search of a roving fish. Walter was at the oars, and Sandy's line glinted in the afternoon sunlight as it curled behind his back and floated out again over the water. The shadows under the firs and hemlocks were deepening slowly and the mountains were changing from blue to purple. In an hour or so the dusk would begin to fall in earnest, but there was still time to do a little fishing.

Jasmin rowed slowly toward the mouth of the river, away from Sandy, for she wanted to be alone. The cold air and the exercise were refreshing, and the blood began to circulate in her veins and her mind felt lighter. When she reached the pool at the mouth of the river, she maneuvered the boat into position, dropped the anchor overboard, and shipped the oars.

Then she sat there, with her hands in her lap, staring at the mountains and the deepening sky. Her fly-rod was beside her on the seat, but she did not touch it for a while.

'Yesterday,' she mused, 'at this time, I was with Tony. If I'd stayed in New York, I might be with him now. I suppose I was a fool . . .'

Life was so elusive in these days, what with the war and

everything, and it was stupid to throw it away just when you had it within grasp. The feeling of dismay which she had been fighting down all afternoon swept over her again.

She was so quiet that a loon rose out of the water a few rods away and stayed there, ruffling his black-and-white feathers. The voice of a bittern punctuated the quiet afternoon, and the swallows swooped and eddied over the marsh on noiseless wings. She picked up her rod slowly, unhooked the red-and-white streamer fly from the butt, and made a long cast across the pool. A small trout rose for the fly, but he was so small she ignored him and made another cast. The loon gave a startled look and dove, but the bittern, who was hidden in the long grass of the marsh, continued to boom at intervals. Jasmin tried to concentrate on the line in front of her, but nothing seemed to matter very much. It was unimportant whether she caught a fish or not. She kept seeing Tony, seated in one of those bars he disliked so much, drinking dry Martinis with some other girl.

Sandy put his fish in the ice-house and went into the camp via the back door. Laura was seated in front of a blazing fire knitting one of her endless sweaters for Britain. She greeted him with a smile.

'Hello, Sandy! What did you get?'

'Two small trout. I rose a salmon, but I missed him.'

Laura asked him if he had seen Jasmin.

'Yes, she's anchored at the mouth of the river.'

'Does she show any signs of coming home?'

'No.'

Laura put down her knitting.

'Sandy, what do you *really* think is the matter with her?'

'I told you yesterday what I thought.'

'Yes, but who is it? I can't imagine where she's been seeing enough of any man to know whether she's in love with him or not.'

'Deep, like her father,' said Sandy dryly, and then regretted his words, for Laura's face closed up.

'That was a tense moment we had in the boat this morning, wasn't it?' he added.

'You mean when we passed the Dwight camp?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, I didn't think it was so bad. It passed off very smoothly.'

'I've always told you that Jasmin ought to know the truth about the Dwights.'

'What's the sense? It all happened so long ago.'

'That, Laura, is one of the stupidest things you've ever said.'

Laura made no reply. Sandy walked into the dining-room and came back with the Bourbon. 'I don't know what your idea is,' he added.

'Because I've always made up my mind I'd never say anything to Jasmin about her father—anything *against* him. I never have. She adores him.'

'That's all right, Laura, but if she doesn't hear it from you she'll hear it somewhere else.'

'If she hears it from me, it will sound biased.'

'Not necessarily. As you say, the story is old stuff now. Just tell her the facts.'

'*What* facts?'

'Well, you don't have to blame it on Roger. You can tell her that it was Margot who really bitched the thing. She won't think any the less of her father. When a woman like that sets out to get a man, he can't help himself.'

'Jasmin will think Roger was terribly weak,' said Laura positively.

'No, she won't, not if you tell her the right way. You've got to make her see what Margot was like.'

'Then I *will* sound biased,' reiterated Laura. 'She'll think I'm still jealous, that I'm just doing it to get even with Margot.'

'Oh, Laura!' said Sandy hopelessly. 'How do you *know* what Jasmin thinks about anything? Does she ever tell you what's in her mind?'

Laura looked upset.

'Why, naturally, she tells me things!'

'You and Jasmin are curiously detached with each other sometimes, for mother and daughter.'

Laura was about to protest that this wasn't so, but she met Sandy's eyes and wilted suddenly.

'Yes, she is reserved with me,' she admitted, 'and I don't know why.'

'Has it ever occurred to you,' Sandy continued, 'that Jasmin is like that because *you* don't confide much in her?'

Laura tried to think up a suitable reply to that remark.

'What, for instance,' added Sandy, 'have you told her about me?'

After a long pause Laura said, 'Nothing.'

'There, you see! That was idiotic to begin with. It was unbelievable of you, Laura!'

'What was there to tell? I mean — '

'For all I know,' he went on, 'she may think we're living in sin.'

'No,' said Laura practically, 'because if we were, she wouldn't have to chaperone us. And she has sense enough to know that if I *was* having an affair with you, I wouldn't do it here. There are some things you don't do when your children are around.'

'Just the same,' said Sandy, 'I wish you'd tell her my intentions are honorable.'

'Any fool can see that,' said Laura mildly. 'You don't look much like a philanderer. — Sandy, darling, Jasmin knows all she has to know.'

'Maybe she does, about you and me — maybe she knows it all without being told — but not about Roger and Margot,' said

Sandy, returning doggedly to the original subject. ‘And I wish, for your own sake, you’d do something about it. Why don’t you get your mother to tell her?’

‘Oh, Sandy, you’re making a mountain out of a molehill! I can’t see the sense in raking that business out of the past. It’s over and done with, and everybody’s forgotten all about it—and only a few people knew the whole story, anyway. I don’t think the village has any idea why Roger and I were divorced.—Here comes Jasmin now,’ she added in relief, for this argument was making her tired and nervous.

Sandy put down his highball and went to the front door. He opened it, and the cold afternoon sunshine mingled with the fire-light. Jasmin was walking slowly up the path with a salmon in one hand and her fly-rod in the other. Sandy’s eyes traveled past her across the lake. South Mountain was the color of Homburg grapes. He looked at it and thought, ‘That molehill Laura’s referring to was once as large as that mountain. It filled the whole lake. She’s determined to forget the thing.—Maybe she’s right. Maybe Margot wasn’t so damned important anyhow.

‘Hello, Jasmin!’ he said aloud. ‘I’ve got a drink waiting for you.’

‘Have you, Sandy? Wonderful!’

She smiled up at him fondly, and he took the fish away from her and went toward the ice-house. She looked better, he decided; more like her usual self. He wondered what was really at the bottom of all this, but it was not his place to ask.

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## *Chapter VII*

**T**HE following day at luncheon Laura announced flatly they were going smelt fishing after tea.

Jasmin looked up from the letter she was reading and glanced silently at her mother's face, for Laura's voice had an odd note in it. She was surrounded with bills and letters which had been forwarded from New York; the end of the table was a jumble of torn envelopes and scattered sheets of paper. Jasmin did not know it, but there was a letter from Roger, unopened, at the bottom of the pile.

'All right, Mother,' said Jasmin briefly.

Sandy, however, protested immediately.

'Must you? Don't you think it would be just as much fun to stay home and play gin-rummy where it's nice and warm?'

'That was what I came up here for, wasn't it?' said Laura with one of her usual scrambled sentences. 'I'm not going to miss it now that I'm here—don't be silly!'

'Do I really have to go along?' asked Sandy ruefully.

'Yes, of course. If you don't the village will talk.'

'They're talking anyway.'

'They'll say you're a frightfully bad sport. Either that, or they'll say you're getting old.'

Jasmin folded her letter and slipped it back into the envelope. 'Yes, Sandy,' she added, 'you've got to come. You'll think it's fun once you get there. And we'll take along a flask to keep your insides warm.'

Laura shoveled her correspondence together and rose. 'I'm going to rest for a while, and then we'll have a high tea at five-thirty before we go to the village.'

She went out quickly, and the dining-room door closed behind her. Sandy and Jasmin heard her climbing the stairs to her room.

Sandy pushed back his chair and lit a cigarette. Jasmin was aching to leave him, but as her mother had left him so abruptly she felt it was only kind to talk to him for a while.

'Jasmin . . .'

'Yes, Sandy?'

'Something has just occurred to me.'

'What?'

'You haven't touched the piano since you've been here. I haven't heard you sing a note.'

'The piano needs tuning,' replied Jasmin.

'How do you get a piano tuner up here?'

'Oh, he comes in a boat. He takes the bus from Farmington, and then he hires a rowboat from Willie Tinker. His name is Mr. Watkins, and he plays Chopin like a dream. He tunes the piano first, and then he plays for me. It's one of the big events of the summer. And then I sing for him. He likes sad tunes like *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* and *Tosti's Ninon*.'

'*Tosti's Ninon*? — I don't know it.'

' "*Ninon, Ninon, que fais-tu de la vie? L'heure s'enfuit, le jour succède au jour* — "'

'That's nice! — But do I have to wait for the piano tuner to hear the rest of it?'

'I can't sing it for you, I'm too full of lunch.'

'Are you going to follow your mother's example and take a nap?'

'I don't think so. I feel restless. I think I'll go for a walk in the woods. Would you like to come along?' she added politely, hoping he would decline the invitation.

'No, thanks, Jasmin. I'm going to sleep for an hour or so. I feel dead to the world. I can't seem to get enough sleep.'

'It's the altitude,' said Jasmin, rising.

She found her mackinaw and went out, followed by Roddy. Her path led past the ice-house, where Bert was cleaning the morning's catch. Three silver fish were lying beside him on the ground. He lifted one by the gills and slit it down the middle and carefully took out the viscera before he spoke.

'Why ain't you out fishin'?'

'I thought I'd go for a walk instead,' was the reply.

'Fishin's good,' he said. 'Mr. Boyne got these three salmon in half an hour this mornin'.'

'Well, I need exercise.'

Jasmin left him and entered the woods. She walked swiftly through the dappled light under the trees, while Roddy sniffed at the matting of dead leaves and pine needles in the center of the path and coursing imaginary partridge. The scream of a jay tore through the silence around them, warning hidden birds and rabbits and porcupines of their approach. Then silence flowed over them again, the deep, ineffable silence of the Maine woods. The path climbed a slight rise and the character of the woods changed; there was less hardwood and more fir and balsam. The air was fragrant with rotting wood, which had a warm, toasted smell, and balsam and spruce gum and fungus and very old, very green moss. The sharp tap of a woodpecker only accentuated the profound silence. High above them a little wind moved in the leafless trees.

Roddy unexpectedly flushed a partridge, and for an instant the silence was drowned in a tumult of rushing, explosive wings. Jasmin looked up and the bird sailed off into the cold blue sky. Roddy was wildly excited, but she quickly brought him to heel and went on toward a distant clearing.

The clearing lay at the bottom of a hill. It had been hacked

out of the woods years ago by lumbermen, and the ruins of the camp they had left behind them were still there, smelling of horses and men, although the log walls were eaten with worms and wood-ants and the roof was falling in. There was a spring at one end of the clearing, and the water was bitter cold and tasted of peat. The ground was covered with checkerberries and wintergreen, and years ago Laura had sown watercress in the spring, and it had taken root and flourished.

Jasmin sat down on a fallen log and opened her letter.

'Dear Jasmin,' it began.

There was nothing very sentimental in his opening words; it was the end of the letter which was so pleasant and so unexpected.

'How is everything, and how are you getting along? I suppose you're half frozen, but you probably won't mind that if the fishing's good, will you? I had dinner last night with a fellow who goes to Middle Dam, and he said he heard the fishing was swell.'

No mention of the girls on the party. Oh, well, never mind. There was more to the letter.

'I haven't heard from the Navy Department yet—still waiting. Mother is going to have a fit when I tell her I'm going into the service. She'll scream that she's lonely, and so forth, but I'm not going to let her persuade me for a minute because I think we're in for a bad time and I want to get a commission before hell breaks loose. I may hear any day now, and I think if we're going to see each other again I'd better come up for the week-end pretty soon. How about the week-end after Memorial Day? It's fresh of me to ask myself, but I want to see you. Let's hear from you soon, Jasmin, and be good. As ever, Tony.'

Roddy took a noisy drink out of the spring and then lay down beside her. A chipmunk ran up a tree and began to scold them, but the dog eyed him passively. He was still emotionally exhausted from his encounter with the partridge. Jasmin stroked his ears, thinking of all the times she had sat here in the clearing

with Roddy, and now, in less than two weeks, they would have Tony with them.

She rose to her feet with a contented smile, picked a bunch of watercress, and walked slowly home along the path. The blazes on the trees were oozing with spruce gum, and she pulled off a few blobs which were hard enough to chew, for Sandy was fond of it. Then she picked a handful of anemones for her mother, and found a piece of white fungus for Loretta. She felt like giving everybody something. She was so happy and contented about Tony that they all seemed more lovable than usual.

At teatime Laura was distracted. She did not answer several times when Sandy asked her a question, and she kept fussing with the spirit lamp under the teakettle, which she insisted was not burning properly, although it seemed all right to Jasmin, who was struck with her mother's appearance, for Laura looked unusually handsome. Jasmin wondered with a slight feeling of shock whether Sandy had proposed marriage again and been accepted . . . But no, that couldn't be it, because Laura wasn't listening to what he was saying. Engaged people, Jasmin decided, were definitely more attentive to each other.

Jasmin helped herself to another hot biscuit and spread it with jam. Her appetite had returned and this was her fourth. Laura, however, merely pecked. When tea was over, she jumped up and said it was time to leave. Sandy looked hopelessly at Jasmin, who laughed, and went to borrow a pair of rubber boots from Walter.

'Cruelty to animals,' said Jasmin.

'Oh, it's good for him,' said Laura breezily. 'Come on!'

The trip down the lake in the outboard was cold, and the fifteen-mile drive to the village was even colder. Laura, however, was grimly determined to enjoy herself. 'After all,' she kept saying, 'it only happens once a year. We can't afford to miss it. And smelt are such good eating. Loretta cooks them simply divinely.'

'Are you proposing to get into the stream and net any of the damn fish yourself?' asked Sandy, who had noticed there were two pairs of rubber boots beside his own in the back of the car.

'Why, yes, of course! I always do.'

'Aren't you getting a little old for that sort of thing?'

Laura's retort was lost as the car bumped over a piece of rough road. Sandy laughed.

'Now, look!' said Laura firmly; 'we've been having this argument about smelt fishing for nine days. Ever since I first suggested it you've done nothing but crab. I'm getting bored with it, and I do wish you'd change the subject. Let's talk about the war, or something constructive.'

Sandy replied that war was hardly constructive.

'Well, then, let's talk about Shakespeare and the musical glasses.'

'—Or sex,' added Sandy. 'That's always good for half an hour.'

'Yes, but only for half an hour,' said Laura.

They turned into the main road, and ahead of them lay the lights of the village. There were a few dregs of twilight still in the west, and they could see the steel-blue waters of the big lake, which were covered with a faint ripple. The shoreline was black and cold and the mountains beyond it were hung with silence. Then a line of square village houses shut out the view and the road changed into a main street. A few shops were still open, and the light from their windows fell cheerfully across the narrow sidewalk.

'I have some errands to do,' announced Jasmin.

'All right,' said Laura; 'we'll meet you down by the brook.'

Half a dozen men in high rubber boots were sitting on the wooden steps of the hardware store waiting for night to fall. Laura opened the window of the car and hailed them.

'How soon are you going to start smelting?'

'Soon as it's dark,' was the reply. 'Ain't no use in goin' down there now, Laura.'

'I knew you were too early,' said Sandy. He switched on the ignition again and backed the car into the middle of the street.

'Where are you taking me?' asked Laura.

'I thought we might go down to the wharf and look at the view.'

There was a handful of stars in the sky and Laura remarked how different this heaven looked from the one you saw in town.

'I never think of looking at the sky in New York, do you?' After that she lapsed into silence.

Sandy took out his pipe, filled it with tobacco, and found a book of matches.

'The trouble with you,' he said at last, 'is that nothing like this ever really moves you. Those mountains — that black water! — why don't you say something?'

'What is there to say that's new? I've seen it for forty-five years. I've said all the things there are to say.'

'That's where you're so wrong, darling.'

'It *is* simply beautiful,' she admitted, looking at the afterglow.

'Lord, how I love it!' he murmured.

'Yes, you do, don't you?'

'That's one of the reasons why all this business seems such a waste.'

'What business?'

'You know what I mean. Why don't you make up your mind?'

'Because . . .'

'Don't you love me at all?'

'Yes, of course I love you,' she replied. 'Anybody would.'

'That's not the sort of love I'm after, unfortunately. I want all of it.'

'But, Sandy, I've told you—'

'Oh, yes, you've told me enough times — but there's always

the next time. You know you should have married me years ago. I've been trying to marry you for almost twenty years. I don't know that I want to wait another twenty.'

'You mean it's now or never, I gather.'

'Well, not exactly. But I do wish you'd understand my side of the situation.'

'I suppose I'm a heel,' said Laura.

'"Bitch" is the feminine term,' corrected Sandy. '— But I don't think you're a bitch, darling. I just think you're foolish.'

'I ought to marry you,' continued Laura, thinking out loud because her conscience was bothering her, 'or never see you again. That's obvious. — But Sandy, I can't imagine what I'd do if we never saw each other again. We've been friends for years!'

'Do you suppose I enjoy friendship? Because I really don't. I dislike every minute of it. I want to get married. — Christ! I want to sleep with you.'

Laura was disturbed. He was usually in command of his emotions. She ought never to have brought him with her into the woods. But at the time he had seemed a bulwark, and she needed him much more than he suspected.

'Let's go smelt fishing,' she said. 'This conversation isn't getting us anywhere.'

'No,' he agreed bitterly, 'and I don't suppose any conversation I have with you ever will.'

'Oh, please, Sandy — ! I'm thinking it over — truly I am!'

He turned his head and kissed her on the lips and then started up the car again. She was telling the truth when she said she was thinking of marrying him, because he was a bulwark, the comfortable shadow of a rock in an upsetting world.

'Margot,' he said out of the blue, 'was the only real bitch I've ever known.'

'I do wish you wouldn't keep on using that word,' she said, 'because it isn't like you. — Turn down that street to the right,

and leave the car there behind the blacksmith shop. We have to walk across the fields.'

She had led the way toward the stream and Sandy followed with the net and a tin pail. Jasmin was already there; they could see her yellow head bending over a lantern. The banks were lined with men in hip boots and there was a suppressed air of excitement about the whole scene. Several villagers were standing in the water, and at intervals they dipped their nets and raised them again full of shimmering life. Sandy went to the edge of the stream and looked in. The water was crowded with smelt, and he could see the flash of their white stomachs as they fought their way upstream to spawn.

Jasmin joined him. 'Are you going to try it?'

'I will after a while. You look absolutely soaked to the skin, sweetheart. You must be frozen.'

'Oh, I'm all right. I've got half a pail full of fish already. It's wonderful tonight.'

She picked a lantern out of a cluster beside them and handed it to him.

'Hold that, will you? I'm going to try it up here. There's too much of a crowd below.'

'That's true,' argued Sandy, 'but they're netting the fish as they come upstream — you won't get any.'

'Watch me!' said Jasmin, and stepped into the stream. The water poured around her legs, for the village authorities had raised the dam and there was quite a strong flood. The little brook was almost in spate. Sandy warned her that the stones were slimy, but Jasmin was too excited to listen to the voice of caution. She waited a moment, peering intently into the dark water, and then dipped the net with an exclamation. Sandy was surprised to see it come out again full of fish which had escaped the ravages of the nets farther downstream. He could hear Laura talking to the men, and her voice sounded more animated than

it had all day. The water looked terribly cold and swift, but the desire to get into it was creeping over him. He set down the lantern and pulled up his rubber boots and buckled them around his thighs, and then found his net, which he had set down upon the grass. Jasmin held the lantern for him, and he stepped off the bank with a splash. Darting fish eddied around him. There seemed to be thousands one moment and then none at all the next. He swore softly as the smelt vanished under his feet, and moved upstream a little way in the hope of finding them. He was really excited now.

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*Chapter VIII*

**T**HE MAIL arrived at Lake Winnebago about noon, and sometimes Bert went down the lake for it, sometimes Walter, and occasionally Jasmin. Sandy was always out fishing in the morning, and Laura was too lazy. Or so it appeared. The truth of the matter was that she was afraid to go for the mail. She had had three letters from Roger in the last ten days, and all of them had been disturbing.

It wasn't that he said anything really upsetting. He was impersonal to a degree. But he was corresponding with her after years of silence. The subject of these letters was always Jasmin. He had some vague plan of spending his vacation with her. He wanted to take her to Northeast Harbor, provided that Laura was willing. Laura wrote back that it was none of her business because Jasmin had reached the age of consent long ago. This did not settle the question at all, as far as Roger was concerned. 'Of course, Laura, knowing how you feel about me, it's only natural that you should have objections . . .'

Laura wrote back that she didn't feel one way or the other about him, and that he was being frightfully conceited if he thought she was still angry with him; but she tore the letter up. It remained unanswered, and a few days later she got another one from Roger in the same strain.

Laura was annoyed, and felt that this was one of the hazards of divorce — you were never, it seemed, really free from any-

body. They still had demands on you no matter how far you ran away from them. And they still harbored things.

It was also disconcerting to find that the mere sight of Roger's handwriting was enough to bring back the days in Vinal Haven when she had waited for the mail in an agony of suspense. As a correspondent, Roger had been erratic enough to keep her in a frenzied condition. When his letters came, she used to rush upstairs and lock herself in her sister Sophie's guest room and read them over and over until she knew every word by heart.

Laura reminded herself at this point that she had retired quickly to her bedroom ten days ago when the first of Roger's letters arrived. But she had read it once, casually, and then torn it into bits and thrown it into the waste-paper basket. Unfortunately she remembered most of it.

There was another letter she could not forget—the one he had written just before the divorce, begging her to reconsider. He had been told to write it, because it was part of the divorce proceedings, and if he had stuck to the usual formal request for a reconciliation, it wouldn't have been so memorable. But Roger, with a rare show of emotion, had let himself go. She had been very moved by it, until someone in the family pointed out that he was taking the attitude that he was the injured party. He was implying that *she* was the one who had wanted the divorce, that *she* was breaking up his happy home. Laura read the letter again, saw they were right, and wrote him back a very caustic refusal. After that they corresponded through their lawyers.

Laura dropped her knitting into her lap and held her hands toward the fire. She was alone in the room. Sandy was fishing and Jasmin had gone for the mail. It was perfectly safe to brood about Roger, because there was no one there to ask why she was pensive or offer a penny for her thoughts.

This letter-writing was very silly. The intelligent thing to do was to write him back and tell him that if he wanted to correspond with the household he must do it with Jasmin. She had

cut him firmly out of her life long ago, and it wasn't dignified or sensible to let him creep back into it like this. He was insinuating himself into her thoughts and actions in a most improper way. It was perfectly stupid to carry on a clandestine correspondence, however platonic, with the man you had divorced for infidelity.

'What's infidelity — !' She could hear Roger saying it now, in this very room. '— Even if I *had* slept with Margot — and I swear to you I haven't — what difference does it make? The thing is, we're married — we've got a child!'

She had interrupted him. 'In the first place, I don't believe you. And in the second place, it *does* matter. It's the disloyalty I can't stand. You've been disloyal.'

'I haven't been anything of the kind!' he protested. 'I've never said a word against you to Margot or anybody else.'

'Words — !' she said, putting all the scorn she could into her voice. And then she had turned away and walked over to the window and looked out across the lake. It was early autumn and the leaves were fluttering by twos and threes into the hollows under the birch trees. She had felt older in that moment than she had ever felt again, and she was only twenty-two . . .

From the eminence of forty-five, Laura looked back and wondered how she had stood it. The young wife over by the window seemed pitifully young. Poor little girl, still madly in love with Roger, who was behaving terribly. Poor Laura, aged twenty-two . . .

Loretta entered the room without ceremony.

'How do you want your smelts done?'

'Oh, bake them,' said Laura, looking up.

'We had 'em that way yesterday.'

'Do them any way you please. I don't care.'

'I thought I might fry 'em in deep fat. Mr. Boyne likes 'em fried. Jasmin ain't pertic'lar.'

Laura thought she could hear the outboard purring along the

lake. In a few minutes, now, she would know whether Roger had written to her again. If he had, she felt she simply could not bear it.

‘—Was you?’ said Loretta again.

‘Was I what?’

‘Was you goin’ to the village this afternoon?’

‘I might—why?’

‘I need some yeast cakes. And we’re out of salt pork. Mr. Boyne says he wants a chowder tomorrow night out of those salmon, and I can’t make it without salt pork.’

Mr. Boyne’s stomach seemed to be of vital importance to Loretta. ‘I suppose,’ thought Laura wearily, ‘she’s trying to learn his little ways in case I marry him. —Oh, dear!’

Aloud she said calmly that they could always borrow salt pork and yeast cakes from Willie Tinker if it was imperative, and it seemed silly to drive thirty miles if they didn’t have to.

‘You look kinda pale, dear,’ added Loretta. ‘The fresh air might do you good.’

‘Oh, I’m all right,’ said Laura hastily.

She could hear the outboard plainly now. She heard it slow down, and then stop altogether.

Jasmin came in with the mail. She spoke to Loretta briefly and handed her the *Lewiston Sun*, and then she gave her mother a couple of bills and an envelope addressed in her father’s handwriting. She was halfway across the room on her way upstairs when Laura found her voice.

‘Here’s a letter from your father, Jasmin.’

‘Yes, I know.’

Jasmin turned, with her hand on the newel post. Her eyes had a lost look in them, and she seemed to be walking in a daze.

Earlier in the day Jasmin had taken her creel off the wooden peg beside the door, found her mackinaw where it had fallen behind Sandy’s rubber boots in the closet, and left the warmth

and comfort of the house. Bert was on the wharf, pouring oil and gasoline into the tank of the outboard. She sat down on the keel of an upturned canoe and watched him for a moment in silence. An idea crept into her mind. If she offered to go for the mail, she would get it in half an hour.

'Bert,' she said casually.

'Yes, Jasmin, what is it?'

'You needn't go for the mail this morning—I'll do it.'

"Tain't necessary, Jasmin. I got plenty of time."

He was fussing with the carburetor. Something was the matter with the float, and he kept pushing it up and down with a horny forefinger. Jasmin stifled her impatience and wondered how she could persuade him that it was absolutely necessary for her to go for the mail.

'I have an errand I want to do,' she said, '—one you couldn't possibly do for me.'

'Have ye?' said Bert, intent upon the carburetor.

'Yes. Willie Tinker has some wood-duck feathers for me. He said if I came down there I could have all I want.'

Bert replied dryly that Willie ought to know better than to shoot a wood-duck.

'That's not the point,' said Jasmin. 'He's got the feathers and I need them to tie some flies.'

'Somethin's the matter with this carburetor,' said Bert, straightening. 'The engine may die on ye.'

'I can always row,' she replied. 'Now let me have the boat.'

"Tain't time to go for the mail yet."

'I want to do some fishing on the way down.'

Bert looked at it mildly. 'In kind of a hurry, ain't ye?'

'No, not specially,' she lied.

She climbed into the boat and shoved it away from the wharf with an oar. Bert told her to fish the opposite shore. He said he had seen Sandy playing a fish there earlier in the morning. She gave the motor a whirl, praying that the carburetor would

not give out on her now; but after a cough and a splutter it settled down into a steady whine. Bert shouted something, but she couldn't hear him. She laid her course absently for the other side of the lake and her face took on a worried look.

Tony hadn't answered her last letter and she wasn't at all sure he was coming for the week-end. He ought to have let her know by this time, but men, she supposed with a flash of irritation, were like that. She was glad she had said nothing to her mother about his impending visit. If he didn't come, she wouldn't have to answer any questions or explain why he had changed his mind.

She knew she was behaving very oddly about Tony, but her nervousness was due largely to the difference in their ages, plus the fact that she was not sure he was really fond of her. It was very intricate having a beau younger than yourself.

The shore was only a few boat lengths away. She turned off the motor and let the boat drift with the wind, which was blowing down the lake. After an interval she rose a salmon; and for the space of ten minutes while she rose him again, hooked him, and maneuvered him into the net, she forgot Tony and everything that was in her mind. But after the fish was in the boat, it all came flooding back again.

'This won't do, Jasmin,' she said to herself.

She glanced at the sky overhead. The sun was in the right place—it must be almost noon. It was time to reel in her line and turn the motor on again. As she hunted for the starting rope, which had fallen under the seat, a verse of Emily Dickinson's popped into her mind:

'What fortitude the soul contains,  
That it can so endure  
The accent of a coming foot,  
The opening of a door!'

Going for the mail was like that, but it was worse to stay at home and wait for it.

She landed at the Outlet wharf and went in search of Willie Tinker. She found him in his office going over his accounts.

'Hello, Jasmin,' said Willie; 'what can I do for you?'

'Well . . .' she began, glancing around the untidy room which had looked the same for twenty years. There was a calendar from the local lumber company hanging on the wall which gave the date as the first of January, a jumble of shotguns and rifles in one corner, a half-empty bottle of hard cider on top of the bookcase. Buried under a snowstorm of bills and correspondence was a vise and other fly-tying material. 'I came to ask you if you had any wood-duck feathers,' she continued. 'I'm out of them.'

'I guess so,' replied Willie. 'Have a look around.'

Jasmin found a handful under a newspaper. 'That's okay,' said Willie. 'You can have all you want.'

'I don't want many,' she said—just enough to show Bert that she was honest.

'Get any fish?'

'One.'

'Any size?'

'No.'

'Fishin' ain't very good this mornin'. Nobody down here got any.'

Jasmin was listening to a truck which was bumping along the road outside.

'There's the mail,' she said ineptly.

Willie rose and she followed him out to the truck. Verne Beecher, who owned the mail route and the express company, was already unloading it. He engaged Willie in conversation, and she thought they would never stop talking. They took the mail bags out of the truck last, after first removing a barrel of live lobsters, half a sheep, and two cases of oranges, all of which caused a lot of—to Jasmin—unnecessary discussion.

Then Willie, who was the official postmaster for Lake Winnebago, had to sort the mail, and this seemed to take him longer

than usual. Jasmin leaned against the lobster barrel and tried to be patient. Willie handed over her letters one by one. There was an envelope addressed in her father's handwriting, and she saw with astonishment that it was addressed to her mother. "That's funny!" she thought.

"Here's another one for ye, Jasmin," said Willie, handing her a square white envelope.

She took it from him calmly and shoved it into the pocket of her mackinaw without opening it. Then she thanked Willie for the wood-duck feathers, said good-bye to Verne, and went down to the wharf.

As she opened Tony's letter, she was convinced that it was going to be something of a blow, and she was not disappointed. "Dear Jasmin," she read, "I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to make it for the week-end."

Jasmin paused briefly and looked across the lake. It seemed very cold and empty and the mountains were hemming her in. For the first time in her life she wanted to get away from it all — Winnebago had turned into a prison. She hated the bleak stretch of cold water in front of her, and the mountains surrounding it were overbearing and monstrous. Oh, God! why did she have to be here *now*?

But there was more to the letter — she must read it and find out why he wasn't coming.

"Now, Jasmin," wrote Tony, "prepare yourself for a terrific surprise. I don't know why Mother never told me this before, and she was very peculiar when I asked her why she had been so secretive about it. But it seems we have a camp on Lake Winnebago."

A look of blank astonishment crossed Jasmin's face, and she shook her head. There were only a few camps scattered along the wooded shore, and none of them belonged to anyone named Carteret. There was Willie Tinker's, and the Blodgetts', and old Mr. Fenway's, and their own, and the Dwights' — that was all.

There must be a mistake somewhere. It was probably on one of the big lakes.

'And what's more,' continued Tony, 'she says she's going to spend the summer there. I tried to persuade her not to, because she hates the woods, but she says she's too broke to live anywhere else this summer. Most of her money was in French mill stocks, and they're all washed up, God knows. She's planning to move next week. I argued with her that it was too early in the season, but she wouldn't listen. —I didn't mention you, incidentally, because I knew that would only complicate matters. She's in a funny frame of mind. To make the situation even more difficult, Tatine, my old nurse, is laid up with some sort of an ailment, and can't do any packing. Mother's absolutely helpless without her, so I guess I'm elected. It's too bad, Jasmin, but it can't be helped. I'm sorry, because I was looking forward to a quiet week-end and a little fishing.'

'I know I sound confused and depressed, but there was a lot of palaver over the thing, and Mother got all worked up over it and was temperamental as the deuce, and Tatine pulled a couple of her remarks. I get the impression that somehow I'm responsible because I'm going into the Navy. Tatine said it was my duty to stay home and take care of Mother, and it was awful.'

'I don't know why I'm telling you all this. I know I ought to say I'm thrilled about seeing you in Winnebago, and all that, but I wish we could have seen each other alone . . .'

Jasmin slowly folded the letter and put it back in the envelope . . . The Carteret camp was probably on Lake Welokenebacook. The names would sound alike to anyone who had never heard them before. The last line of his letter ran through her mind again and a smile appeared in her eyes: '—but just as soon as I can, I'll come and see you, even if I have to beat a path through the woods to your door. *A bientôt, Tony!*'



## *Chapter IX*

SANDY came home at dusk with a very sober face. He entered the house by the back door as though he did not want to see Laura until he had to. The kitchen was fragrant with the rich aroma of fried pork, and he tried to interest himself in the chowder kettle. 'I don't think,' he said to Loretta, 'that you put in enough onions.'

'I put in three, and they were nice'n big,' she replied doubtfully, 'but I'll fry you up some more if you want.'

'Just one will do it. How about pilot biscuits?' he added, stalling for time.

'We've got plenty of those. If someone would get me a yeast cake, we could have raised rolls, the kind you like, but everybody said they was too busy.'

Sandy said she was ruining his figure, and went slowly toward the living-room.

Laura was listening to the radio. The war news was bad, and she was twisting the dials in an effort to get New York. There was a lot of static, and as he came into the room she gave a muttered imprecation and tried another station.

*'C'est Montréal . . . et maintenant, les communiqués de la guerre . . .'*

The Canadian news reports were given in French and then English and in both languages sounded equally depressing. Laura sighed and turned to London. Sandy, who was standing with his back to the fire watching her, heard the voice of the B.B.C. announcer purring over three thousand miles of ocean.

'This is London calling . . . There has been another raid over a south coast town . . . The Air Ministry reports that three of our aircraft are missing . . . A communiqué from Egypt says . . .'

'Laura!' exclaimed Sandy, clearing his throat.

'Yes, dear, what is it?' said Laura absently, frowning over the static.

'Turn that damn thing off.'

Laura switched off the radio in surprise. His voice sounded nervous.

'Look, Laura,' he said, 'I have something to tell you.'

'Something about Jasmin—?' she exclaimed. 'Have you found out—'

'No, this has nothing to do with Jasmin. It's *your* little headache.'

'Go on!' she said as he paused. 'I can take it, whatever it is.'

'Well,' he continued, 'when I went out on the lake this morning I saw smoke rising from the Dwight camp, and I went to investigate. I thought it might be picknickers. But it wasn't. The door was open, and old Jim Woodruff was in there with a couple of cleaning women from the village.'

'Getting it ready for what?'

Sandy looked at her without answering.

'I see!' said Laura after a protracted silence. 'Margot's coming home . . .'

'Yes, Margot's on her way.'

Laura sat down limply on the bench beside the fire. She could hear Jasmin moving about overhead. She was singing to herself — something about spring being here today and gone tomorrow. — Jasmin had been only two years old when Margot left Lake Winnebago — not old enough yet to understand. But now she was twenty-four.

'That — God — damned — bitch!' said Laura softly.

'Don't, Laura!'

'Oh, yes, she's doing it on purpose . . . It's revenge . . . She

wants to make us all miserable because Roger didn't marry her. It's just like her.'

Sandy said quietly, 'Don't jump to conclusions — there may be another reason.'

'Damnl' said Laura under her breath.

'Now don't let Jasmin see you're upset,' admonished Sandy. 'If she finds out the truth — and she will before long — just let her think you don't care any more.'

'I *don't* care!'

'Then stop swearing.'

Sandy hunted around for his pipe and filled it; then he kicked the fire, and a cascade of sparks flew up the chimney. Laura's eyes were snapping with anger.

'You know,' he said mildly after a while, 'what you ought to do now.'

'What?'

'Get married.'

'I don't see what she has to do with that.'

'She has a lot to do with it. If you leave here for any other reason, she'll think you're running away from her. You don't want her to think that, do you?'

'No.'

'She says you drove her out of here, and now she wants to pay you back.'

'Then you agree with me that it's revenge?'

'Maybe.'

'I'm not going to get married,' added Laura, 'just because of Margot.'

'No, I wouldn't want you to. But think it over.'

Laura rose to her feet.

'Now what?' he asked.

'I'm going to get the Bourbon,' she replied. 'I need a drink. — Anyway, it's time. It's a quarter of seven. Call Jasmin.'

She went out of the room and he smoked his pipe for a

moment alone before he called to Jasmin. 'I hope,' he said to himself, 'that Margot will behave . . . chiefly for Jasmin's sake.'

But in his heart he knew she wouldn't. It was too much to hope that she would endure the boredom of the Maine woods without some form of excitement. She adored situations and she thoroughly enjoyed dramatizing herself. If she could make a drama out of this, she would. Also, she was both a sadist and a sentimentalist, and it was a bad combination.

Jasmin came downstairs of her own accord. She had changed from dungarees into a blue woolen dress which matched her eyes. He observed that she looked very pretty, and she thanked him and wandered over to the piano. She touched it with one finger, decided it was not too sour after all, and began to play.

*'Aujourd'hui le printemps, Ninon, demain l'hiver. Quoi! tu n'as pas d'étoile, et tu vas sur la mer! . . .'*

Laura came in with the cocktails, followed by the dog. She set the tray down upon a table and looked out of the window. The sky behind the dark mountains was stained with a rose-red twilight, and the water was a thousand shades of violet and blue. One pallid star was glimmering above the pine tree beside the wharf. 'So beautiful! . . .' she thought, 'so utterly beautiful, and she's going to spoil it all for me again. The lake isn't big enough to hold the two of us. — But I'm not going to let her spoil it for Jasmin! — never! never!'

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## *Chapter X*

JASMIN . . .' said Loretta hesitantly. Jasmin looked up from the fly she was tying. The table in front of her was littered with wood-duck feathers and strands of colored chenille and silver thread. Some of the feathers had drifted across the floor and Loretta was patiently sweeping them up.

'Yes, Loretta, what can I do for you now?' asked Jasmin.

'Was you goin' fishin' this mornin'?'

'Well, I was thinking of it. Why?'

'If you could go down to Willie Tinker's and borrow a couple of yeast cakes . . .'

'You were having that trouble yesterday. Didn't anyone get you a yeast cake?'

'No, they was all too busy. Mr. Boyne was askin' for some cinnamon buns, and I wished—'

'All right, Loretta, I'll get you one,' said Jasmin. It would give her an excuse to go for the mail. She finished tying the fly, applied some black varnish to the head, and put away her materials. Loretta looked at the finished product.

'That's awful pretty! My! I don't see how you do it. If I was to try it my fingers would be all thumbs.'

'Yes, and if I tried to bake cinnamon buns, my fingers would be all thumbs, too,' returned Jasmin as she rose.

She went in search of her mother to tell her she was going to the Outlet. Laura was in the toolhouse. There was a half-empty barrel of clay pigeons beside her, and she was oiling the trap. Jasmin wondered in passing why her mother had taken a sudden

interest in shooting clay pigeons at the height of the fishing season.

'Why don't you get Bert or Walter to do that?' asked Jasmin.  
'Because they're working on the pump,' replied Laura briefly.  
'Oh, Lord!' said Jasmin, 'has that thing gone on the fritz again?'

'Yes, and if they don't fix it we won't have any water tonight.  
— Where are you off to now?'

'I'm going down to Willie Tinker's to borrow a yeast cake.'

'We oughtn't to borrow so many things from Willie. Don't forget to say we'll pay him back just as soon as I can get to the village.'

'I'll take you now, if you like,' said Jasmin. 'I don't have to go fishing.'

'No, dear, I want to fix this. I want to get it ready so Bert can set it up this afternoon,' replied Laura, adding, 'Don't forget the mail.'

'No, I won't.'

Jasmin moved toward the door of the toolhouse.

'Wait a minute!' said Laura.

Jasmin turned, and Laura put down the oil can and wiped her hands on a piece of cotton waste. 'You know that letter I had from your father yesterday—'

'Yes, what did he have to say?'

'— I meant to speak to you about it last night, but I didn't get an opportunity. He says he can get off next week and he wants you to go to Northeast with him.'

'When?' asked Jasmin with a sinking sensation. This would have to happen now.

'I said — next week.'

'I can't go,' said Jasmin; 'I have to chaperone you and Uncle Sandy.'

'Yes, that's true,' said Laura.

Jasmin silently thanked God for Sandy's presence at camp.

'It's funny,' she added after a moment, 'that Father hasn't written to me.'

'Yes, it's extremely funny,' agreed Laura dryly. 'I don't see why *I* have to be brought into it.'

'Oh, Mother!' protested Jasmin.

She wished that time had mellowed her mother's attitude toward her father, but apparently it was just as unreasonable as it ever was. Laura's face was flushed and she kept toying nervously with the cotton waste.

'I'll ask him to stop writing to you, if you like.'

'I've already told him myself.'

Laura reached for the oil can again and Jasmin realized the subject was closed. She left the toolhouse without saying anything more and went down to the wharf. All the way to the Outlet she kept wondering why a divorce for mere incompatibility should leave so much bitterness in the heart afterward.

Verne Beecher's truck was drawn up beside the wharf. Jasmin asked him if Willie was through sorting the mail, and when he said no, she sat there and talked to him for a moment. Verne said the ice was all out of the big lake, and a sport from Boston had landed a seven-pound trout at Gunner's Cove.

'What are all those cartons for?' inquired Jasmin. 'Has Mother been buying more groceries?'

'No, these belong to the Dwight camp.'

'The Dwight camp — !' said Jasmin thoughtfully. She turned her head and looked at the distant shore. A column of pale blue smoke was rising from the chimney.

'Vernel! Who's moving in — do you know?'

'People named Carteret.'

Jasmin disciplined her voice so there was no surprise in it. 'I thought the Dwights still owned the camp,' she said casually. 'Have these people bought it, or rented it?'

'I dunno. Jim Woodruff's over there with Minnie Trotter and Anola Frisbee. They've been working there the last two

days. Minnie says the place is a sight. The squirrels got into the upholstery and the mattresses, and Anola found a dead porcupine under the kitchen stove. She says she dunno how it got in there.'

'I wish I could see what the camp looks like inside,' said Jasmin. 'It must have been attractive once.'

'Yeah, it was a nice camp,' said Verne.

Willie came out of his office with the mail. He saw the cartons on the wharf and said, 'Who's all that stuff for?'

Verne told him.

Willie started to say something, and then saw Jasmin sitting in the stern of the outboard. 'Hello, there!' he said awkwardly, 'where'd you come from?'

'Home,' said Jasmin. 'I came to borrow a yeast cake.'

'Jessie!' he bellowed to his cook, 'bring Jasmin out a couple of yeast cakes.'

Jasmin thanked him as he handed them to her and said they'd pay him back as soon as someone went to the village. He gave her the mail, and she glanced through it, but the letter she wanted had not come. 'Oh, dear!' she said to herself, 'I suppose he was too busy.'

She started the motor again and headed up the lake. When she was opposite the Dwight camp, she shut it off again and let the wind take her inshore. Jim Woodruff was burning trash behind the camp, and the acrid smell of old rubber and mattress ticking and feathers hung in the air. Minnie Trotter was on the porch beating some red-and-brown Navajo rugs. The slap-slap of the paddle she was using echoed through the quiet woods. Minnie stopped work and leaned over the railing. She looked a trifle harassed. Her hair was in wisps and her bare arms were covered with soot.

'This place is a sight,' she said warmly.

'I'll bet it is,' replied Jasmin. 'Verne tells me some people named Carteret have rented it for the summer.'

'Yes, I believe they's some relation of the Dwights.'

'Oh, is that it?' said Jasmin.

She could see Anola plying a mop inside the house, and she seemed hurried.

'How soon do you have to get the house ready for them?' she asked cautiously.

'They was comin' Tuesday, but Jim got a telegram this mornin' sayin' they'd be here tomorrow, Saturday.'

Tomorrow . . . Only a handful of hours were left . . . Only one little day remained of all the long weary ones she had been spending without him . . . It was unbelievable, but there was Anola, plying a mop.

'Minnie,' she said aloud.

'Yes, Jasmin?'

'There are a lot of cartons for you down at the Outlet. You'd better tell Jim.'

'All right, I'll tell him.'

Jasmin started up the motor again and went home. Laura was not in the house, and neither was Sandy. She found Sandy in the woodshed hunting for kindling, and she asked him where her mother was.

'I don't know,' he replied. 'I think she went to see if Bert fixed the pump.'

Jasmin picked up an armful of wood. 'Sandy,' she said casually, 'have you heard about the Dwight camp?'

'Well, what about it?' said Sandy.

'Verne told me it had been rented or sold, or something, and I stopped there on my way home. I talked to Minnie Trotter, but I didn't get much out of her.'

'So you've come to me. — Well, what do you want to know?'

Before she could reply, he had walked out of the woodshed toward the house. She trailed after him.

'Verne says that some people named Carteret,' she went on, 'are going to live in the house. What happened to the Dwights?'

'Dwight married Carteret,' said Sandy.

'You mean Mrs. Carteret was a Miss Dwight?'

'No, she was a *Mrs.* Dwight.'

Sandy threw the kindling on the fire and she handed him the logs. There were sheds of bark all over the floor and she brushed them carefully toward the hearth. She said casually, 'Did you ever know her?'

'Who?'

'Mrs. Dwight.'

'I saw her once or twice,' he replied, 'but it was so long ago I wouldn't know her from Adam. Her second husband was a Frenchman.'

Yes, it was all fitting together, like blocks in a Chinese puzzle.

'Sandy, if I confide in you, will you keep your mouth shut?'

He turned on his heel and stared at her. She was standing with the hearthbroom in her hand and she looked oddly radiant. He wondered what in the name of God she was going to tell him.

'I've never seen Mrs. Carteret,' she said, 'but I happen to know her son, Tony.'

Sandy did not say anything at first. He walked slowly back into the center of the room and stood there, rocking on his heels. His face was devoid of expression.

'Why don't you want to tell anybody?' he said finally.

'I don't know, Sandy. I'd just—rather—not. Silly of me, but I wish you'd keep quiet about it for a while.'

'Are you in love with him?'

'Yes.'

Sandy took his hands out of his pockets and drew them slowly over his gray hair.

'You ought to tell your mother,' he said.

'No, I don't want to.'

'You *must* tell your mother.'

Jasmin bent down and stirred the kindling with the tongs.

The flames licked the birch logs and there was a crackle of sparks. She was far more interested in the fire than what he was saying. A feeling of despair went over him.

'Jasmin, did you hear what I said? You'd better let your mother in on this.'

'No,' she answered, 'no, Sandy. I'll tell her in a day or so. I want her to meet him first. — You see, he's younger than I am, and she may think I've lost my head.'

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## *Chapter XI*

**T**HE LONG, cold, northern afternoon was beginning to fade along the ridges behind the lake. Patches of purple shade were creeping up South Mountain, and the blue tinge was ebbing from the water. The breeze had died, and in the woods the vesper sparrows had begun to sing.

From time to time Jasmin paused in her fishing and strained her eyes toward the Outlet. Years of looking across five miles of lake had made her far-sighted and she could identify little dots and blobs of color which would have been meaningless to an outsider. Willie Tinker was launching his motorboat. Originally christened the *Wah-wah-taysee*, she was always referred to in simpler English as the *Firefly*. She was broad in the beam, with an ample freeboard, and kept the more timid of Willie's sports comfortably dry in rough weather. She had a six-cylinder engine which was always breaking down, and a habit of veering to starboard if you did not put enough pressure on the wheel. She was the only motorboat on the lake. Everybody else used outboards.

Willie had been trying to launch her since eleven o'clock. The ways were old and in need of repair, and he was having his troubles. Bert and Walter had gone down after lunch to give him a hand. While Jasmin was watching the tiny black figures at the other end of the lake, she saw Jim Woodruff leave the Dwight camp, also headed for the Outlet. Her heart gave a little skip. Jim must be on his way to get Tony. A moment

later, the *Firefly* entered the water with a splash. She could see three or four men moving along the shore toward the wharf. The *Firefly* began to move under her own power. She described a majestic circle in the water, like a dowager making a tour of a ballroom, and then drew up beside the wharf. Ordinarily Jasmin would not have missed the excitement of the launching. She would have been down at the Outlet, giving advice like everybody else and plying a crowbar if necessary. But she wanted to see Tony for the first time alone, not in the presence of most of the population of Lake Winnebago.

She went back to her fishing. Loretta had told her that the larder was getting low, and as no one had been to the village for a week, the problem of what to use for an entrée was growing serious. It was not like Laura to be a sketchy housekeeper, but Jasmin had given up wondering what was on her mother's mind.

She made another cast, but nothing happened. A pair of gulls hovered in the afternoon sky, gliding slowly overhead with their wings outstretched. From the deep woods behind the mouth of the river came the song of sparrows and robins and chickadees. The tapered line went out with a gentle hiss, and came in again leaving a furrow in the ruffled water. She changed her fly, substituting a blue hackle for a red one. Her forearm was growing tired, for some reason she was hungry, and her mind was down at the other end of the lake.

Consequently, she did the one thing that is always fatal. She looked at the Outlet again to see what was happening, and at that instant a fish rose for the fly and she missed him.

She cast again in the middle of the huge rise he had made, but he had seen her. After ten minutes of fruitless casting she decided to go home.

She was pulling up the anchor when the *Firefly* left the dock at the Outlet and headed up the lake. She could see the boat plainly, for the rosy afternoon sunlight was glistening on her newly painted hull. Behind her came Jim Woodruff in his out-

board. He was alone, and Jasmin's heart sank. She wondered why the *Firefly* was making a tour of the lake at this hour after a difficult launching. Willie usually retired to the office with the other guides and gave them something for their services, but they wouldn't get their Bourbon this afternoon unless he turned around quickly.

Loretta hailed her as she neared the wharf.

'Get anythin', Jasmin?'

'No,' said Jasmin.

'Maybe Mr. Boyne got some fish,' said Loretta hopefully. 'There ain't anythin' for supper but canned corn'-beef hash. Somebody'll jest have to go to the village tomorrow. — Land!' she added with an exclamation of surprise, 'here comes the *Firefly*!'

'Yes,' said Jasmin, turning her head, 'they launched her all right.' To her surprise, the boat was heading for the Dwight camp.

'Who's that in the stern?' asked Loretta.

'Anola and Minnie, I guess.'

'Don't look like Anola to me. Anola didn't have a hat when she came up the lake this mornin'. I know, because I was washin' dishtowels at the end of the wharf and I saw her.'

'Must be them new people,' she added after a moment. 'That must be Mrs. Carteret.'

'Yes, it must be,' said Jasmin absently. She was looking at a tall figure in the bow of the boat. He was hatless, but he had on his winter overcoat, for the afternoon was very cold. She saw him disembark from the *Firefly*, and watched the little cavalcade go up the path to the camp and disappear.

'Well,' said Loretta, 'I guess I'll go and start up the fire in the living-room. I don't see any signs of Bert or Walter yet.'

Jasmin tied the boat to the cleats on the wharf with trembling fingers. It was ridiculous to feel as moved as this, but she couldn't help it. When she recognized the tall figure in the bow of the

*Firefly*, every vein in her body had begun to throb. For an instant she was disturbed and frightened, but the feeling passed, leaving her standing foolishly on the wharf with the painter of the boat in her hand. She wrapped it securely around the cleat and followed Loretta up to the house.

By the time she had taken a bath and dressed for dinner, twilight had fallen in earnest. Loretta lit the oil lamps and brought out the cocktail tray and put another log on the fire. Jasmin wondered what was happening at that other camp a few hundred yards down the shore, whether it was comfortable at all after the twenty years in which it had been tenanted by squirrels, wood-mice, and porcupines.

Laura opened the front door.

'Hello, darling,' she said, 'did you get any fish?'

'No, and I hope you did,' replied Jasmin, 'because there's nothing in the house but corned-beef hash.'

'It's good hash,' said Laura. 'I bought it at Pierce's.'

'We'll have to go to the village tomorrow. Loretta says she needs a lot of things, and Bert broke the Stillson wrench while he was fixing the pump.'

'All right, we'll go after breakfast.'

Laura took off her coat and hung it behind the door.

'Have you written to your father yet?' she asked.

'No, I was going to do it this afternoon, but Loretta persuaded me to go fishing instead.'

'Why don't you write to him now before dinner and get it over with?'

Jasmin sat down at the desk. She was not in the mood to write to her father, but she knew her mother would not be satisfied until she did.

'Dirigo Point, Lake Winnebago, Maine. Dear Father . . .'

Jasmin paused, for she didn't know how to start the body of the letter. It was rather awkward to explain to her father that

her mother had another man with her in camp. Her eyes wandered to the gun over the dining-room door. Her father had hung it there years ago, and he had made the hooks himself out of alder roots. When he bought that gun, he expected to use it every fall for the rest of his life . . .

Sandy entered from the kitchen.

'Hello, Jasmin, where's your mother?'

'She went upstairs to change for dinner.'

'Laura!' called Sandy. 'Loretta wants to know how you want that salmon cooked.'

'Boiled, with hard-boiled egg sauce,' was the reply.

Sandy went back into the kitchen.

'If Father had been here still,' mused Jasmin, 'he would have done the same thing. He would have called to her, just like that. But he was foolish, or thoughtless, or cruel, or something, and now I have to write and tell him there's another man at Dirigo Point.'

She finished the letter and put it in an envelope. Sandy reappeared and began to mix the cocktails. He asked her whether she wanted a Martini or a Manhattan.

'Martini, thanks,' she answered briefly.

She wandered toward the window. The water was only faintly rippled and it was the color of old glass. A loon rose through the water a few yards from shore, and his slender black-and-white head was silhouetted against the pallid green ripples. She noticed that the patches of snow on South Mountain were beginning to fade, and the birch trees were veiled in bright green.

'I suppose you know Tony has arrived,' said Sandy briefly.

'Yes, I know,' she replied.

'Have you seen him yet?'

'No.'

'Have you told your mother?'

'No, Sandy, I haven't. You know why I haven't.'

'All right,' said Sandy, 'it's none of my business, but I wish you'd listen to me.'

After dinner Laura and Sandy played backgammon, leaving Jasmin to her own devices. She tried to read a novel, but her eyes kept straying toward the fading light outside. She wondered what she ought to do. Finally she put down her book and opened the door of the coat closet.

'Where are you going?' asked Laura.

'Out,' she replied laconically.

'Wear something warm, darling,' said Laura, 'it's very cold.'

Jasmin slipped into her mackinaw and found a red woolen cap embroidered with edelweiss. Then she quietly left the house. The evening star had come out, and a few birds were still singing in the woods. It was the best hour of the day. Summer twilights were more colorful, perhaps, but there was something about a spring evening which defied comparison. She sat down on the upturned canoe and looked at the evening star. After a while she heard the splash of a paddle and saw Tony coming toward her in a canoe.

She rose to her feet and waited. 'Get in,' he said quietly as he reached the dock.

He paddled around the next point into a little bay, and let the canoe slide into the rushes.

'Hello, Jasmin,' he said, 'how are you?'

'I'm all right, Tony,' she replied. 'How are you?'

'I couldn't beat a path to your door,' he said with a short laugh, 'because there's an absolute wilderness between the two camps. I tried, and then I took the canoe.'

'Yes, there's no way of getting to me by land.'

'Mother asked where I was going, and I simply told her I needed fresh air and exercise. I couldn't stand any more palaver tonight.'

'What happened?'

'Oh, God, it was awful! Tatine complained every step of the way, because she was cold, and then, when we got to the Outlet, Mother said it was rough, and she wouldn't go in the outboard, so I had to hire a motorboat.'

'Yes, I saw you coming down the lake in the *Firefly*.'

'You did?' he smiled. 'Where were you?'

'On our wharf.'

'I was so tied up in knots by that time I wasn't thinking of anything but a drink, otherwise I would have seen you. — God! but women are awful on a trip. — You're not like that, are you, darling?'

'Tony,' she said, 'why didn't you know where the camp was?'

'I suppose I did, really. Mother says she told me where it was, so she must have.'

'I'm still awfully confused.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, for one thing, I'm confused about the Dwights.'

'My mother was married to Barclay Dwight, first. Then she married a man named Carteret.'

'Yes, I know all that.'

'Did you find out that Barclay Dwight was my father?'

'No — was he?'

'My real name is Dwight, but Mother changed it for some fool reason when she married Henri.'

'Why don't you change it back?' said Jasmin.

'I don't know — I never thought of it. I suppose I can, now.'

Jasmin lapsed into puzzled silence. Tony lit a cigarette and said, 'What's the matter?'

'I'm just wondering,' she replied slowly, 'why I never used to hear the family talking about the Dwights. It seems odd, when they lived next door.'

'They probably had some sort of a row.'

'Oh, Heavens! Do you think so?'

'Don't let's worry about it now,' said Tony, putting out his cigarette. 'It's a beautiful night and the stars are out. Aside from the fact that it's damn cold, it's lovely.'

He backed the canoe out of the rushes and made for the point. It was covered with pines and there was very little undergrowth, for trillium and Solomon's seal and convallaria and bunchberries do not flourish under their heavy shade, and there was only a soft mat of pine needles.

'What are you doing?' asked Jasmin, who thought he had suddenly taken it into his head to go home.

'I want to kiss you,' he answered, 'and I'm afraid of upsetting the canoe. Let's land here.'

Jasmin got out of the canoe in silence and climbed the slippery bank under the trees. There was a desperate feeling in her heart, but she stilled it and looked up at the dark fringe of pine needles overhead. This was either an end or a beginning—she didn't know which. She heard him pull up the canoe and drop the paddle under the seat; then he climbed the bank.

'Jasmin,' he said quietly.

She turned, and he took her in his arms. He did not kiss her at once, but laid his cheek against the rough surface of her mackinaw and held her without speaking, clinging to her as though he needed comfort.

'Tony!' she murmured, 'what is it?'

'Nothing,' he answered. He kissed her, and she knew as their lips met that he wasn't going to tell her why he had clung to her. Then he drew her down under a pine tree and they sat there in silence, locked in each other's arms.

'What's the matter with you?' he said at last. 'You're funny tonight, Jasmin.'

'Am I?' she said.

'Yes. You—you're distant, for some reason. What have I done?'

'You haven't done anything, Tony.'

'Then, for God's sake, Jasmin — !'

'What do you want me to do, go farther than this?'

'No, I certainly don't,' he returned, but his arms were still around her and she could feel his lips on her cheek. With a sudden motion she slipped away from him and leaned her head against the pine tree.

'Jasmin, darling, you're so lovely . . .'

'I'm older than you are, Tony.'

'Does that make any difference?'

No, not if they loved each other. But there was still this dreadful uncertainty in her mind, this haunting feeling that he was merely attracted to her and had no intention of letting himself fall in love.

'Come here, sweet!'

She could feel him pulling her toward him . . . Was it possible for a man to do this to you if he didn't love you? . . . Was it possible for any of these things to be going on unless . . .

'Jasmin, darling, let me kiss you again!'

'No, Tony, no!'

'Don't be frightened, sweet. I love you — don't you know that?'

'I didn't know . . .'

'Christ! Did you think I'd do this if I wasn't in love with you?'

He put his arm around her again and held her so that she could not move away from him. His lips were tenderly possessive, and his hands were very gentle. On the lake, a pair of loons began to call to each other across the dark water. The night air was fragrant with pine and balsam . . . The pine needles underneath them were very smooth and very soft . . . In the faint starlight she could see him smiling down at her.

'Jasmin,' he whispered, 'oh, Jasmin! . . .'

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## *Chapter XII*

L AURA was wandering aimlessly between the kitchen and the living-room with a marketing list in her hand when Jasmin came downstairs for breakfast. Sandy was reading the *Boston Herald*, which he had omitted to read the day before, and he had dressed with a little more care than usual because he had every intention of going to the village with Laura. He had changed from a khaki shirt to a blue chambray with a plaid tie, and he was wearing gray flannels.

'Good morning,' said Jasmin briefly.

'Dearest,' said Laura, 'how do you spell Stillson?'

'Two l's,' said Jasmin. 'Never mind about the wrench — I'll buy it. I know just the size he wants.'

She sat down and Sandy glanced at her over the top of the paper.

'Are you going with us?'

'Yes, of course.'

'I just wondered,' said Sandy, returning to the *Herald*.

Laura said they would have to leave soon so they could get back in time for lunch. She went in search of Bert to ask him if he had filled the tank of the outboard.

'Were you out with Tony last night?' asked Sandy.

'Yes,' replied Jasmin.

'Jasmin, I know I'm being difficult about this, but you don't understand —'

'Now, everything's going to be all right,' said Jasmin. 'Just leave me alone, will you, darling? I'll tell Mother this afternoon.'

'What are you going to tell her?'

'The truth, naturally.'

He started to say something, but Laura came back with the announcement that the outboard was ready.

'I wish you'd come now before the lake gets any rougher,' added Laura. 'It's blowing out of the west, and if we don't leave soon we'll get wet.'

'Where's my raincoat?' asked Jasmin, rising.

'I don't know — where did you put it?'

'It's under mine,' said Sandy, folding the *Herald*. Jasmin opened the closet and took out both raincoats. They put them on and followed Laura down to the wharf in silence. The boat shipped a lot of water on the way down, some of which got in Laura's hair. By the time she arrived at the Outlet, she looked healthy but disheveled, and Jasmin wished her mother could have been a little neater the first time Tony saw her, but he'd have to get used to the way people looked in the woods.

When they arrived in the village, Jasmin vanished in the direction of the hardware store to buy two spark plugs and the Stillson wrench, and Laura and Sandy walked down the street to the chain store to do the marketing. Laura was thinking about tapioca and wax candles when she opened the door of the First National, and Sandy was thinking about Jasmin, so it came as something of a shock to both of them to find the store was occupied by Margot.

Laura heard her voice before she saw her — the voice she had loved once and grown to hate with a bitterness that was still sharp after twenty years. Margot was among the slabs of bacon and corned beef in the rear of the store, asking for sweetbreads. 'Sweetbreads — I' thought Laura, 'isn't that typical!'

'Shall we do our shopping later?' murmured Sandy.

'No,' said Laura, 'we won't.'

Sandy listened to Laura in admiration while she calmly ordered a number of things, beginning with tapioca and wax

candles and ending with yeast cakes. He could hear Margot buying roast beef and veal cutlets with a lavishness which must have delighted the manager, who was used to the more frugal methods of Laura and the village women. Laura added half a pound of pea beans to her list; and Margot came out of the meat department. She was dressed in a very smart tweed suit and a perky little hat, which put Laura, who was clothed in a coat and skirt which had been beaten by the wind and rain until they were shapeless, at a bad disadvantage, but Laura was undaunted. She calmly went on buying the ingredients for Saturday night's baked beans.

Then Sandy held his breath, for Margot turned her head, and the two women were face to face for the first time in over twenty years. Margot stared at Laura for a moment, and Sandy was forced to admit that she was also behaving well, for her expression did not change. After a pause she said, 'Hello, Laura!'

Laura smiled politely in return, and murmured, 'Hello, Margot!' and Sandy's breathing returned to normal.

Laura paid for her groceries and Sandy followed her out into the street, burdened with paper bags.

'Well, that's over,' she commented as she walked up the street. Sandy said she had behaved beautifully.

'Margot didn't behave so badly herself,' replied Laura. 'I wonder where the boy was.'

'He must be somewhere around the village. We'll undoubtedly run into him.'

Laura was silent as they made further purchases at the drug-store and the fruit market, and every time a door opened and someone else came in to buy a dozen oranges or a tin of bicarbonate, her eyes had a searching look in them, which Sandy failed to notice. He was still thinking of Margot, and how little she had changed in the past twenty years. There was the same impudence, the same brittle gaiety — even the same bright gold tint of her hair. Her figure was a little plumper, that was all.

Laura preceded him out of the fruit market and said they must hunt for Jasmin, as it was time to go home. She was probably still in the hardware store, gossiping with the proprietor about the weather, the fishing, and the summer residents, so they went there. The store was very large and full of everything a hardware store has to offer, including fishing tackle, a stuffed moose head, three large brook trout mounted on birch bark, and a variety of guns, both new and second-hand. It was a moment or two before they saw Jasmin, who was half-hidden by a mountain of stovepipes. She was talking to a young man in a khaki shirt. Jasmin did not see them; her face was flushed and gay, and they could hear her laughter echoing through the dark store.

'Who's that with her?' asked Sandy casually, although he knew.

'I've no idea,' said Laura slowly, her face gray. Her heart was turning over in her breast. She rested her hand against the fishing-tackle counter to steady herself as the blood in her veins turned to water. From where she was standing, she could see the boy quite well; there were the dark, level brows, the gray eyes, the slightly oval face; and there was Jasmin looking up at him with almost the same eyes. Laura thought for a moment that she was going to be ill, but she controlled the feeling of nausea which went over her and walked toward her daughter.

'Oh, hello, Mother!' exclaimed Jasmin. 'I want you to meet Tony Carteret.'

'How do you do?' said Laura in a level voice.

'Tony and I met each other in New York last winter, at the Stevens,' she continued. 'His mother has a camp on Winnebago.'

'My father was Barclay Dwight,' explained Tony, coming to her aid, 'but my name was changed to Carteret. You must have known my father.'

'Yes,' said Laura quietly, 'I knew him. I used to know Barclay very well. And I was very sorry and upset when he died. He

was a lovely person. — Come on, Jasmin! We must hurry or we'll be late for lunch.'

She turned on her heel and walked swiftly out of the store, followed by Sandy. Jasmin was a little upset by her mother's brusque manner, for it wasn't like her to be short with people. She said good-bye to Tony and went out to the car.

When they were in the boat halfway down the lake, her mother said abruptly, 'When did you meet him?'

'Who? — Tony? I met him at the Stevens'.'

'You never mentioned him.'

'Didn't I?' said Jasmin innocently.

She was still annoyed by her mother's attitude, for even if she disapproved of him — his youth — she could have been polite on first meeting him. She said testily: 'Neither did *you* mention him. The whole thing was very embarrassing this morning, for I had no idea his mother owned the next camp to ours. Why didn't you ever tell me the Dwights had a son my age?'

'My dearest child, you never asked me,' said Laura swiftly. 'If I'd known you were interested, I'd have told you. They went to live in Europe when you were about two years old.'

'Did you ever know them well?'

'We saw a lot of them at one time,' replied Laura, 'but I hadn't laid eyes on Margot for years until I met her this morning in the First National.'

Jasmin wished that she had followed her mother into the chain store because she had a natural desire to see what Tony's mother was like.

Sandy was unnerved by this conversation and made a bad landing. The boat scraped the end of the wharf and took off some of the new paint on her bows.

'You didn't shut her off soon enough,' said Laura.

Sandy said briefly that the spark had jammed. Neither of them looked at the other.

From the woods toward the mouth of the river came the sound of shots being fired at intervals. It was after lunch, and Laura was shooting clay pigeons.

'I'll go out and tell her,' said Jasmin. 'If you're so determined to have me tell her right now, I suppose I've got to. But I still don't understand why you feel this way.'

'Jasmin,' said Sandy, 'there is something you don't understand, which I can't explain to you. Now will you mind me?'

Jasmin put on her woolen cap.

'Why do you suppose she's taken to shooting clay pigeons at this time of year?'

*Because Margot's a rotten shot,* replied Sandy to himself. Aloud he said, 'I don't know. Don't ask me why your mother does anything.'

Jasmin walked out to the pigeon trap. Bert was inside the shed releasing the birds, and her mother was breaking them one after the other with beautiful precision. The birds sailed out over the wide expanse of the marsh, which was dotted with little islands of grass growing out of coal-black mud. A few dead trees raised their weatherbeaten arms here and there among the grass, and the water among the reeds was the color of old mahogany. Laura broke a neat right and left and then turned to her daughter.

'Want to try it?'

'That gun doesn't fit me.'

'Why didn't you bring the twenty-gauge?'

'I wanted to talk to you.'

'What about?'

'I'll wait until you're through . . . I'm in no hurry.'

Bert released another bird, which dissolved in fragments against the cold blue sky. Laura was a better shot than any of them—better, even, than Roger. She was an indifferent fisher-woman, but her shooting was beautiful. Jasmin watched her with a feeling of pleasure.

'Where's Sandy?' asked Laura between shots.

'He's in the house, writing a letter. I think he's waiting for you to go fishing with him.'

'I've almost had enough,' said Laura. 'I'll shoot five more and then I'll stop.'

At the end of the fifth shot, she broke the gun, and Jasmin began to pick up the shell cases scattered over the turf. Laura sat down on a fallen tree with a sigh.

'My shoulder hurts.'

'I should think it would. That gun kicks like a mule.'

'No, it's not that, but I haven't shot since last fall. Tell Bert to go and get Sandy's boat ready.'

Jasmin opened the door of the shed and spoke to Bert, who disappeared a moment later along the path which led back to camp. Laura nervously lit a cigarette.

'I'm glad you came out here, Jasmin,' she said, 'because I wanted to talk to you about something.'

Her voice sounded strained and Jasmin glanced up in surprise.

'Yes, Mother, what is it?'

'Were you out with that boy last night?'

Jasmin straightened.

'Why didn't you tell me where you were going when you left the house?'

'I didn't know I was going to see him. I was sitting on the wharf when he came by in a canoe.'

Laura blew a cloud of smoke into the air. 'I don't think it's quite right for you to stay out as late as that.'

'Why, I came home at eleven o'clock!'

'No, you didn't—it was after midnight.'

Jasmin protested with a laugh, 'Why, Mother, what if I did? You never care what time I get home.'

'I don't mind how late you stay out in New York, but up here—I mean, I don't think you ought to have the guides see you come in after midnight, especially with a strange young man.'

'How did they know we hadn't been deer-jacking?'

'You ought to have had someone with you.'

Jasmin laughed helplessly. 'Mother, what in the world is the matter with you? You're unbelievable!'

'I'd rather you wouldn't do it again,' said Laura stubbornly.

Jasmin threw the shell cases into a box in the shed and came back with a frozen face.

'I'm sorry you didn't like Tony,' she said stiffly.

'I didn't say I didn't like him,' returned Laura. 'I'm simply telling you that I don't want you running around the lake at night.'

'But I always have!'

'Yes, you've gone deer-jacking with Bert or Walter, and you've fished after dark, and you've paid calls on Willie Tinker—but that's different. Loretta was awake when you got home last night, and I know she wondered what was going on.'

Jasmin was torn between laughter and anger. She started to say something more, changed her mind, and walked swiftly away into the woods. Laura remained where she was, and smoked half a packet of cigarettes. Outside the toolhouse Jasmin met Sandy, who had been looking for a pair of pliers to make some minor repair on the radio. He noticed the angry flush on her face, and his eyes deepened.

'No luck,' she said briefly. 'I was lectured instead.'

'What for?'

'Staying out with him after midnight. You'll have to admit that it was hardly the moment for me to tell her I was fond of him.'

'Where are you going now?' asked Sandy as she moved on.

'For a walk,' she replied. Her voice was confused and angry. He let her go, wishing to God that Margot had never been born.

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## *Chapter XIII*

HERE was a high wind blowing on the lake, but here in the woods the air was still and the silence profound. Jasmin rowed the boat upstream between the overhanging alders, and the only sounds were the soft splash of an oar or the occasional song of a white-throated sparrow. The loneliness of the river as it carved its way through the woods was so deep that it belonged to another world. Farther along, the river was full of noisy rips and eddies, but here there was only the slow curl of the tide, the almost imperceptible flow of peaty-brown water, and the swaying pavanne of the reeds along the banks. Later on in the summer the long grass above the water would be studded with meadow-rue, and the shallows would be bright with small yellow water-lilies. Behind the margin of grass lay the deep woods, cool and dark, and soundless—a wall of black firs and pines and hemlocks under a brilliant sky.

Jasmin had left her tackle at home, for the river was not open to fishing until June. Instead, she had a picnic basket and a bundle of kindling. From time to time she shipped the oars and listened for the sound of footsteps on the old logging road which paralleled the river, but it was almost impossible to hear anyone walking, as the road was ankle-deep in moss.

'I hope to Heaven Tony won't get lost,' she thought. 'He probably doesn't know how to follow the blazes.'

She rowed quietly on—not because there was any reason for silence other than to catch the sound of feet on the logging road—but the tranquillity around her was too impressive to have it

spoiled by the splash of a hurried oar or the thump of the bow against a submerged log. The river curved toward the west and grew narrower and swifter. She was almost at the end of her journey. One more bend in the river and she would have reached the picnic ground. She rounded the bend, and there he was, sitting on the bank waiting for her. When he saw her, his face lit up.

'Hi, there!' he called, 'how are you?'

'I'm sorry I couldn't bring you in the boat,' she said.

'I wondered why you told me to walk. What's the matter?'

'I'll tell you later. Help me out with this stuff, will you?'

He caught the painter and tied it to an overhanging fir, and then lifted the basket and the kindling out of the boat and carried them up to the picnic ground. There was a rough wooden table in the center of the clearing, weathered by age and dotted with lichen, and behind it was a small fireplace made of round, blackened stones and lengths of old pipe. Jasmin knelt down to build the fire, but he exclaimed, 'Here, I'll do that!'

He took the kindling from her and asked for some newspaper.

'I forgot it,' she said, 'I always forget something, I'll get you some birch bark.'

She came back a moment later with her hands full of bark and found him examining the picnic basket. 'Gee whizl' he exclaimed, 'we're having steak!'

He weighed the meat in his hands and looked at it admiringly. 'Wonderful — ! Where did you get it?'

'I borrowed it from Willie Tinker,' she answered.

Tony, however, failed to see the humor in this remark, because he had still to learn that if you didn't have anything, you got it at Tinker's.

She took a knife and a bag of potatoes out of the picnic basket and sat down under a tree while Tony lit the fire. When he was through, he came and sat down beside her.

'Now will you tell me why I had to walk?'

'Oh, Tony, can't you wait until after lunch?' she murmured.  
'I'll explain later.'

'What the hell is the matter?' he said.

Jasmin hesitated. She was not in the mood to tell him now because she wanted this picnic to be as cheerful as possible. It was his first, and it might, because of the Navy, be his last.

'I gathered from your note that something had upset you,' he went on. 'What is it?'

'Mother's attitude. When she found we'd been canoeing last night, she lectured me again. This time she was almost wild.'

Tony frowned. 'I don't get it.'

'Neither do I. None of it makes any sense—but there you are!'

Jasmin dropped the parings into the paper bag, and then began to cut the potatoes into long strips.

'You're not going to take it seriously, are you?' he asked after a pause. 'I think all this clandestine business—making me take that long walk through the woods—is ridiculous! For God's sake, what's the matter with her?'

'I don't know,' replied Jasmin. 'She's been in a strange mood for three weeks. She does everything on impulse. And she's irritable with Sandy, and she got mad at Father because he wrote to her and asked if he could take me to Vinal Haven. I had to answer the letter and tell him not to write to her any more because it upset her.'

'You're free, white, and over twenty-one,' said Tony, 'can't you do what you want?'

'Apparently not,' said Jasmin.

'They're treating you like a kid of sixteen.'

'It isn't "they"—it's only Mother.'

Jasmin sliced the last potato and put down her knife. 'I think I know what's the matter,' she said, looking away from him at the river.

'Do you?'

'I think she's probably upset over the difference in our ages.'

'Did she say anything about it?'

'No, but it's the only thing I can imagine *would* upset her.'

'Bunk!' said Tony succinctly.

Jasmin rose and tended the fire, which was in danger of going out. She threw on another piece of kindling, gave it a poke with a long stick, and then set the coffee pot down among the coals.

'What can I do to help?' asked Tony.

'Nothing, unless you want to,' she replied.

'I don't "want to." I'd much rather lie here and watch you. You're so pretty,' he murmured, 'and you comfort me.'

'Tony,' she said hesitantly, 'something was the matter with you the other night — the first night you arrived — what was it?'

He did not answer her immediately. He stared at the dark branches above him as though he was turning something over in his mind. Finally he said: 'I'd had a hell of a trip with Mother and Tatine. I told you that . . . But you don't know yet what they're like — at times they almost drive me crazy. The trouble with Tatine is, we've had her too long, and she thinks she can say exactly what she pleases. And Mother never knows what she wants . . .'

He sat up and beckoned to her. 'Come here! — I don't want to talk about it now.'

Jasmin bent down and kissed him. He put his arm around her shoulder and held her for a moment without speaking. She felt nearer to him than she had ever felt before, and she understood his silence; he was enjoying something, and if he told her everything that was in his mind, he would spoil it.

The coffee boiled over for the third time, and she straightened up hastily and took it off the coals. Then she melted a can of shortening in an iron spider and began to fry the potatoes.

'My, those smells are wonderful!' said Tony after a while.  
' . . . Darling, are you going to cook for me when we're married?'

Jasmin was turning the potatoes with a fork.

'Jasmin, did you hear me?'

'Yes, I heard you.'

'You might say something.'

'I'll cook for you, if that's what you want.'

It was actually the first time he had mentioned marriage. She was overcome with a foolish desire to cry. 'What in the world,' she thought, 'is the matter with me? Why am I so surprised?'

'I want a lot more than that,' he said quietly. 'Come here!'

'No, Tony—I will *not* kiss you again until after lunch.'

She said it lightly, but her heart was full.

Tony relaxed again on the turf and closed his eyes. The fire flamed and sputtered as the juice from the steak fanned the embers into life again, and the air in the clearing grew rich with a delicious mixture of wood-smoke, seared meat, coffee, and fried potatoes. He was happier than he had been in years. A wonderful bird was singing behind him in the woods, and he asked her what it was.

'It's a white-throated sparrow,' she answered.

'What's the other one?'

'I think it's a veery.'

He decided that some atavistic strain in him was responsible for this deep feeling of contentment. This was an inheritance from his father, who had been happier in Winnebago than any other place. His mother had been cruel when she took him away from the woods. 'If it wasn't for this God-damned war,' he thought, 'Jasmin and I could live here perfectly contentedly forever.'

He watched her as she moved around the fire. Her face was very earnest, and she had a smudge on one cheek. The pale sunlight in the clearing was falling on her blond hair, which had been blown about by the wind on the lake, and he noticed with amusement that her nose was shiny from the heat of the fire. She looked up and their eyes met.

'What's the matter?' she asked. 'What are you laughing at?'

'You've got a smudge on your cheek,' he replied, 'and your nose is shiny. — No, don't do that,' he said as she reached for her compact; 'I like you better the way you are.'

She put a huge pile of golden potatoes on the table and sat down. 'Come on, Tony. Everything's ready.'

'That's good,' he said as he rose, 'because I was getting faint with hunger. Where's the carving knife?'

'In the basket.'

He handed her a generous portion of tenderloin, but she wasn't hungry.

She ate some of it because he protested, and drank three cups of black coffee in quick succession.

'You won't sleep tonight,' he said as she drained the third. She didn't tell him that she probably wouldn't sleep in any case.

'Look,' he said when they were through, 'what are we going to do about this situation?'

'You mean Mother — ?'

'Yes. Maybe I ought to tell her we're engaged.'

'No, I wouldn't do that.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know "why not" . . . I just have a feeling that she wouldn't take to it kindly at the moment.'

Tony poured himself another cup of coffee. He seemed more annoyed than disturbed by the situation, and she knew that he was taking the attitude that her mother would come to her senses before long.

'There's another thing,' she went on. 'I haven't mentioned this before, but Sandy's been behaving queerly too.'

'I thought you said he wasn't mad at you.'

'He isn't. But from the very first he has insisted that I tell Mother the truth . . . He wants her to know we're in love with each other.'

Tony lowered his coffee-cup. 'Would you mind telling *me* how Sandy knows we're in love?'

'I told him.'

'Why, darling?'

'I can't imagine. I did it on impulse. Sandy's sort of a bulwark; you can lean on him, and he never betrays confidences. I often go to him with my troubles.'

'Why doesn't your mother marry him?'

'Darling, if I knew that, I'd be happier about a lot of things.'

'Why do you suppose he wants you to tell your mother you're in love? I don't get that either.'

'I don't know, unless he thinks I oughtn't to keep things from her. He lectures me from time to time about that. He says I ought to confide in her more.'

'Don't you and your mother get along?'

'Yes, we adore each other, but our relationship is hard to describe . . . She's never been possessive about me, the way most women are about their children. She loves me, and she fought tooth and nail to get complete custody of me at the time of the divorce, and she's made a lot of sacrifices for me, but I've always had the feeling — Oh, I shouldn't say this!'

'Go on, darling, say it.'

'I have the feeling that something else comes first. She's wonderful to me, but I'm not her whole life.'

'Then why in the world is she acting this way now? Under the circumstances, I should think she'd take it more calmly.'

'I don't know why, Tony!'

Tony threw the stub of his cigarette into the fire. 'Let's skip it,' he said. 'I'm not worried.'

He swept the silver into a pile and took it down to the river to wash it. When he came back, he said there was a trout rising under the opposite bank.

'We can't fish for him,' said Jasmin, 'because the river isn't open yet.'

'Do you realize we haven't been out fishing together yet?'

'Yes, I know . . .' said Jasmin hesitantly.

Tony bent and kissed her. ‘Listen, sweet, we’re going fishing this afternoon.’

‘Tony — ’

‘Yes, we are,’ he said firmly. ‘We’re going out on the lake, and if your mother says anything, you can tell her—I don’t care what you tell her—but we’re not going to stand for any more of this nonsense. I’m the boss now,’ he added with a fleeting grin; ‘you’ll do as I say.’

‘Will I?’ said Jasmin.

‘Always . . .’

He drew her into his arms and kissed her. He could hear a bird singing and the deep flow of the river below the picnic ground. Her hair smelled of wood-smoke and her cheeks were cool and fresh under his lips. He was utterly happy, and the feeling was so unusual that it came as something of a shock.

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## *Chapter XIV*

MRS. EMERY walked slowly up the steps of Willie Tinker's main camp and opened the door.

'Willie!' she called, 'Willie, where are you?'

He came hurrying out of the office. 'Mrs. Emery — ! How did you get here? We weren't expectin' you.'

'I took a bus,' she replied. 'Do you know where Bert is?'

'I think he went to Middle Dam.'

'What for?'

'I didn't ask him.'

'Is my outboard down at the wharf?'

'Yes, Mrs. Emery, but you can't run it up the lake yourself. I'll take you in the *Firefly*.'

Mrs. Emery sat down suddenly in the nearest chair. She looked pale and tired. Willie offered her a glass of Bourbon, which she accepted without hesitation.

'I'm weary,' she said, '— very weary. I never slept a wink all night. The train was full of crying children, and there was a man opposite me who had a cough. It was cold, too. I asked the porter for an extra blanket, but he said they were all in use. Then I lost my thermos.'

'We thought you weren't comin' until the end of the month,' said Willie. 'Bert was expectin' you around the twenty-fifth.'

'I changed my mind,' said Mrs. Emery.

She sipped her Bourbon and felt better. She would sit here for a little while and get her breath, and then she would let Willie take her home in the *Firefly*.

'Who brought you out here from the village?' asked Willie.

'I don't know. Some man I found in the garage. He charged me three dollars and I thought it was too much, but I was too weary to argue with him. I wish I knew why Bert took it into his head to go to Middle Dam.'

'Is there anything I can do for you?'

'No, there isn't,' said Mrs. Emery. She drank the rest of her Bourbon and handed him the empty glass.

'Do you feel all right now?' asked Willie.

'Yes, much more like myself. I think I'd like to go home now. Can you take me?'

'Yes, right away,' said Willie.

He carried her bags down to the wharf and she followed him slowly. He was alarmed by the way she moved, for she was usually quite active. She sat down heavily in the stern of the boat and he wrapped an old steamer rug around her knees. The controls of the *Firefly* were in the bow, so he had to leave her. He looked back once or twice during the trip down the lake to see if she was comfortable, and saw her gazing at the eastern shoreline with a bemused expression. As they neared Dirigo Point, however, her expression changed to one of pleasure and two faint spots of color appeared in either cheek.

Willie piloted the *Firefly* in to the wharf, and helped her out. She reached for her purse, but he said, 'No, I won't charge you nothin' for that, Mrs. Emery. I didn't have anythin' to do this noon, anyway. — You all right?'

'Yes, I'm all right,' she replied. 'Thank you very much, Willie. Just leave the bags on the wharf, and I'll get Walter to come for them.'

She walked up the path to the house, and he watched her go with misgivings, for she was not at all like her usual, ebullient self. He started up the engine again, wondering what it was all about.

Mrs. Emery climbed the porch steps, paused for breath, and

then slowly opened the door. Laura and Sandy were sitting in front of the fire—Laura with her knitting and Sandy with a newspaper. She thought dryly that it was a very domestic scene.

‘Mother—!’ gasped Laura with a cry of astonishment.

‘Didn’t you get my telegram?’ said Mrs. Emery crossly.

‘No, of course not!’

Laura kissed her mother in mingled surprise and bewilderment. Mrs. Emery looked at Sandy, who was saying nothing at all.

‘Hello,’ she said, ‘how are you?’

‘I’m fine,’ he replied evenly. ‘I’m sorry we didn’t get your telegram—it must be sitting in the village. Who brought you down the lake?’

‘Willie Tinker. I was upset when there was no one there to meet me. It was the last straw.’

She relaxed with a sigh on the fire bench.

‘Oh, Mother!’ protested Laura, ‘why did you come as soon as this? It’s an awful trip at this time of year! What made you do it?’

‘I thought I was needed,’ said Mrs. Emery, ‘—but perhaps I wasn’t. You seem quite calm. I am afraid I rushed to conclusions yesterday when Sandy’s letter arrived. But I’m here, and there’s nothing I can do about it. — Sandy, put another log of wood on the fire. I’m freezing to death.’

‘*What conclusions?*’ asked Laura.

‘I thought you’d be more upset by your neighbors. I also thought it would be dignified for me to be here—she was always afraid of me.’

‘If you’re talking about Margot,’ said Laura, ‘I haven’t seen her, and I don’t intend to see her.’

‘Yes, you have,’ said Sandy practically; ‘you met her in the village.’

‘How does she look?’ asked Mrs. Emery.

'Plump,' said Laura.

Sandy said that she looked much the same, and that her hair was still bright yellow.

'Did you speak to her, Laura?' asked Mrs. Emery.

'Yes, of course, Mother.'

'What did you say?'

'I said "Hello, Margot."'

'I am very much relieved that you didn't cut her,' said Mrs. Emery. 'I was afraid you might.'

'Oh, I wanted to!' said Laura. 'But my early training prevented me. You always told me that no one with breeding ever cuts anybody. I was overcome with breeding, so I said, "How do you do?" — and Margot said, "How do you do?" — and that ended it.'

'Oh, dear,' murmured Mrs. Emery with a sigh.

'I know!' said Laura, '— it's terrible the way life repeats itself. I thought I was rid of Margot forever.'

'Yes, but your problem isn't the same now. She can't take Roger away from you again. That's one comfort.'

Laura reflected that it was about the only comfort. She wondered how she was going to tell her mother that there was another problem this time, and that it was far worse than losing Roger.

'Of course it's unfortunate,' went on Mrs. Emery, 'that Margot has turned up again, but we ought to have been prepared for it. She still owned the camp, and we had every reason to believe that she would use it again.'

'She always hated it,' replied Laura. 'She swore she'd never come back here if it was the last act of her life.'

'Why *did* she come back? Sandy forgot to tell me in his letter.'

'It was the only place she could live without paying rent. She's broke.'

'I know this is very hard on you, Laura,' said Mrs. Emery, 'but you'll have to stand it. Be dignified whenever you see her, but never let her think she can upset you again.'

Laura avoided looking at Sandy, who was staring at her from the other side of the room. Mrs. Emery began to unwind the Shetland scarves around her neck. The fire was making her feel warm and comfortable again. She was vastly relieved to find that Laura was not upset.

'Where's Jasmin?' she asked, unwinding the third scarf.

'She went up the river.'

'What for? The river's closed.'

'She said she was going in search of fiddlehead ferns,' replied Sandy.

'It's too late for fiddleheads.'

'I don't know *why* she went, Mother,' said Laura, who had her own suspicions.

'Is she coming home for lunch?'

'No,' said Laura.

'— And will one of you tell me,' added Mrs. Emery, 'why Bert took it into his head to go to Middle Dam?'

'Somebody had a sawmill for sale, cheap,' replied Laura.

'Do we need one?'

'Yes; Bert's getting too old to chop the wood by hand.'

'What's the matter with Walter?'

'Nothing, but you need two men on a bucksaw. Bert's hands are so crippled with arthritis he can't hold the saw. I was afraid you'd object to the expense, but I told Bert to go ahead.'

Mrs. Emery rolled up the scarves and put them beside her on the bench. 'The taxes on Dirigo Point are so terrible I haven't enough money left for a handkerchief, let alone a sawmill. But I suppose we have to have wood.'

Loretta ended the conversation by appearing suddenly in the room.

'Land!' she exclaimed, '— Mrs. Emery! I thought I heard your voice in here, but I said to myself, "Loretta, you're crazy!"'

'Hello, Loretta,' said Mrs. Emery, without explaining why she was there; 'how are you?'

'Just dandy,' replied Loretta cheerfully. '— If I'd known you was comin', I'd have made soda biscuits for lunch, but everybody round here said they was gettin' too fat, so we're only havin' lamb stew and a salad. — Bert went to Middle Dam,' she added superfluously.

'What time did he say he'd be back?'

'He didn't say. — You ain't plannin' to sleep over to your own camp tonight, are you?'

'— Yes, Mother,' interposed Laura, 'you're not, are you? — because it's awfully cold. It's clean — Anola and Minnie cleaned it — but it's cold and damp.'

'I don't know,' said Mrs. Emery, with characteristic unwillingness to let anybody manage her. 'I'll see.'

She stretched out her feet and toasted the soles of her shoes, and gradually a current of warmth began to seep through her icy veins. She was sorry in one way that she had come to Maine, but in another way she was glad. It was delicious to be in front of a fire again, toasting the soles of your shoes. Laura opened the door and went out; and she could hear the slap of the water against the wharf and the wind moving in the trees. The sound carried her back fifty years to the afternoon Laurence had brought her there, shy, frightened, and half frozen. How she had hated it then, and how she loved it now!

The door closed behind Laura, and she was alone with Sandy.

'Well . . . ?' she asked.

'I didn't think you'd come as soon as this,' he said. 'Why did you?'

'Because I could tell from your letter that you were keeping something from me. What is it, Sandy? — What's the matter?'

He was almost tempted to answer her, for she seemed calm now and the color had come back into her cheeks. But he thought Laura should tell her—Jasmin was Laura's child, not his.

'It's nothing about Roger, is it?' she asked.

'No,' he answered in surprise. 'What made you think it was?'

'I don't know why it occurred to me it was Roger,' she answered, 'excepting that we met him one night at the Philharmonic. I knew he was in America, and during my wilder moments I thought he was here, too.'

'Roger—here!' said Sandy with a short laugh. 'I don't think he wants to see Margot again. He was heartily sick of her before he was through.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Emery, 'but men are so funny.'

'Roger may be a fool, and all that,' said Sandy, 'but I doubt if he'd be enough of a heel to pursue Margot up here, even if he did want her.'

'Why did Jasmin go up the river?' asked Mrs. Emery obliquely.

'She didn't go in search of fiddleheads,' replied Sandy.

'So I gathered from Laura's expression. What's the matter? Have they had a fight?'

'I'm not sure why she went,' replied Sandy, '—ask Laura.'

'You mean you're not going to tell me.'

Sandy was hunting through his pockets for his tobacco pouch, and it was obvious that he wasn't going to say anything more.

Mrs. Emery said with a sigh: 'You're very annoying, Sandy! Why don't you tell me what's the matter? I'd much rather hear it from you, because Laura never tells me everything. Jasmin is undoubtedly in love with somebody Laura doesn't approve of and they're having a row. —Are they?'

'You're getting warmer.'

'Who is it?'

'That's what I won't tell you.'

'All right,' said Mrs. Emery grimly; 'if you're going to be

maddening, go and find Laura and ask her to come here. I want to know the truth.'

Sandy went out, and a moment later Laura entered the house by the kitchen door. Her face was pale.

'Did you want me, Mother?'

'Yes. What's wrong between you and Jasmin? Now tell me everything, Laura, because I'll have to know it sooner or later. Please, dear!'

Laura looked helplessly at her mother and then sat down.

'I don't know what to do about this,' she said, '— I don't know what to do!'

'Jasmin's in love — isn't she? Why don't you like the boy?'

'It isn't a question of whether I like him or not,' replied Laura; ' — he may be very nice, for all I know — but Jasmin can't marry him.'

'Why not?'

Laura looked up at her mother unhappily. 'Didn't Sandy tell you who it was?'

'Sandy told me nothing. Who is it?'

'It's Margot's son.'

Mrs. Emery gazed at her in blank astonishment. 'Where in the world did she meet him?' she exclaimed ' — in the village?'

'No, in New York.'

'Why didn't she tell us?'

'She didn't know who he was. Margot changed his name to Carteret.'

'Carteret!' echoed Mrs. Emery.

'Wasn't it like Margot to change it? — anything to be different! I suppose she thought Carteret sounded more aristocratic than Dwight.'

'Poor Barclay!' said Mrs. Emery.

Laura leaned forward, clenching her hands in her lap with a sudden gesture of panic. 'Mother, this thing must not go on! I won't have it, I tell you!'

Mrs. Emery looked at her with a troubled frown. ‘Laura, you’re taking it too hard. You mustn’t feel this way. I know you hate Margot, and I don’t blame you, but—’

‘That’s not it,’ said Laura swiftly, ‘that’s not it! You don’t understand!’

‘Yes, I do. You hate her guts, to put it vulgarly. But you’ve got to control yourself, Laura. If Jasmin is really in love with him she ought to have him.’

‘No! no! no!’ said Laura under her breath, on the verge of tears.

‘Don’t be so silly, Laura! I hate to see you still jealous of Margot. —Good Heavens, the whole thing happened twenty years ago! Can’t you forget it?’

‘I’m not thinking of myself,’ protested Laura miserably; ‘I’m thinking of Jasmin.’

‘If he’s anything like Barclay,’ added Mrs. Emery, ‘he’s probably a very nice boy. But if he takes after Margot, of course she mustn’t marry him.’

‘He’s younger than Jasmin,’ said Laura.

‘Yes, but that doesn’t matter. Sophie was a year older than Gifford. —My dear, you must not let yourself go like this!’ exclaimed Mrs. Emery in dismay as Laura drew her hand across her eyes. ‘You’re in a frightful state!’

‘I know, but I can’t help it. You don’t understand,’ muttered Laura.

‘Perhaps I don’t,’ agreed Mrs. Emery, ‘because Laurence was always faithful to me. But if he *hadn’t* been, I wouldn’t have let it wreck my life.’

‘It hasn’t wrecked my life,’ said Laura flatly.

Mrs. Emery was beginning to suspect that Laura, as usual, was withholding her real reason for objecting to the marriage. Her argument was vehement, but it was not entirely convincing. And she kept saying, ‘You don’t understand.’ Obviously there

was something more than Margot behind all this. Mrs. Emery gave her a baffled look and rose to her feet.

'It must be nearly time for lunch,' she said, moving toward the stairs. 'I'm going up to wash my hands and face. Will you tell Loretta to tell Walter that my bags are still on the wharf?'

'Yes, Mother,' replied Laura.

She stared into the fire without moving after her mother had gone, and although the birch logs were radiating plenty of heat, her hands were trembling and her feet were cold.

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## *Chapter XV*

**A**BOUT three o'clock Laura caught sight of Jasmin and Tony approaching Dirigo Point in a canoe. She told her mother dryly that if she wanted to see what Tony looked like she could see him now. Mrs. Emery crossed the room and opened the front door.

'What are you going to do?' asked Laura in alarm.

'I'm going to ask them in,' replied Mrs. Emery. 'I want to talk to the boy.'

'Very well,' said Laura, 'if you must, I suppose you must. But I wish you wouldn't.'

'Now, Laura,' said Mrs. Emery mildly, 'I know what I'm doing.'

She went out and a moment later Laura heard a startled exclamation from the canoe: 'Grandmother — !'

Sandy, who was reading by the fire, put down his book. Laura said to him, 'You'd better go and get the drinks.'

He rose without comment and went into the kitchen. When he came back, Laura added, 'I haven't had a chance to tell you what Mother said . . . '

'No.'

'She said, that if he was anything like Barclay, Jasmin ought to marry him. She was always fond of Barclay.'

'He was a nice chap.'

Laura was put out. 'I never dreamed you'd side with Mother,' she said stiffly.

Sandy replied evenly that he wasn't taking sides—he had merely made the remark that Barclay was attractive.

'Boys are apt to take after their mothers,' persisted Laura.

'If you want to know what I think,' said Sandy, dropping ice into a glass with a thoughtful frown '— you're making too much of all this. Why can't you take it in your stride?'

Laura opened her mouth to retort angrily that she had hoped he would stand by her in this crisis, but the door opened and Mrs. Emery walked in followed by Jasmin and Tony. Jasmin looked disheveled and ridiculously happy.

'What's Gran doing here?' she exclaimed. 'I couldn't be more surprised!'

Nobody answered her. Tony glanced around the room and exclaimed, 'Isn't this attractive!'

Laura, feeling smug, knew that he was comparing it to his own camp, which was always in a state of disorder because Margot hated it. She tried not to look at him and kept her eyes pinned on the black-and-white Navajo rug at her feet.

Tony pointed to a large stuffed trout over the bookcase. 'How much did that weigh?'

'Five pounds and a quarter,' replied Sandy.

'Who caught it?'

'I did,' said Mrs. Emery. Tony looked at her with badly concealed astonishment, and Mrs. Emery smiled. 'It's not a lake trout,' she added, 'in case you thought it was. It's a *Salvelinus fontinalis*. — As a matter of fact,' she went on, confusing him still further, 'it isn't a trout at all — it's a char.'

'The American brook trout,' explained Sandy, 'is really a char. — What'll you have with your Bourbon — soda or plain water?'

'Soda, thanks,' replied Tony. His roving eye had caught sight of the gun over the dining-room door.

'That's a Purdy,' said Jasmin. 'It belongs to me.'

'No, it doesn't,' thought Laura, 'it belongs to Roger. It's Roger's gun.' She raised her eyes in time to see Tony run his finger along the barrels, and the room went blank for a moment. Roger always did that.

Tony broke the gun and looked through it. ‘Oh, boy!’ he said wistfully. ‘What a lovely gun!’

‘Would you like to try it?’ said Jasmin. ‘Come on, Mother — let’s go out to the trap.’

Laura rose silently and took an old shooting jacket out of the closet. She did not want to go with them, but she was afraid of her mother’s eyes. As she led the way out to the trap, she was filled with dread and a sort of horrible fascination. Sandy vanished into the shed, and she could hear him fussing with the trap. A moment later he shouted, ‘Are you ready, Laura?’

‘I don’t want to shoot first,’ she objected.

‘Oh, yes, please do!’ exclaimed Tony politely.

It seemed foolish not to give in, so she dropped a pair of shells into her gun and closed it with a little snap. She called to Sandy that she was ready, and a bird sailed out over the marsh. She fired and missed.

‘Steady, old girl!’ she said to herself; ‘you’ve got to do better than that.’

A second bird whirled out of the shed and she counted five before she let go. Fragments of clay fluttered downward through the air, and Jasmin murmured, ‘That’s more like it!’

Feeling steadier, Laura broke twenty-four birds out of twenty-five. Tony was silently impressed with her shooting, and when she sat down he rose reluctantly, because he knew he was out of his depth. She handled a gun better than any woman he had ever seen.

Laura watched Tony covertly as he fitted the shells into the barrels and her face grew pale again. Roger had that same trick of giving the shells an extra shove with his thumb. Tony swung on the first bird that sailed through the air with an ease which made her heart turn over. ‘That sort of shooting,’ she thought, ‘is born in you.’

He broke eleven birds while she watched him in silence, clasping her hands in her lap.

Sandy opened the door of the shed. 'I've run out of birds,' he said. 'Have we any more?'

'No,' said Laura thankfully, 'we haven't. I sent for some last week, but they haven't come.' She felt tired and in need of a drink. She rose suddenly and walked into the woods. Sandy called to her, but she walked on hurriedly. She wanted to be alone for a moment. He caught up with her as she reached the ice-house. He started to say something, but she gave him a look.

'Leave me alone,' she said. 'Don't ask me what's the matter.'

He gave a shrug and dropped behind her as she strode down the path. Mrs. Emery was still sitting on the fire bench, doing nothing. As Laura and Sandy entered, she came out of her abstraction and sipped her Bourbon. 'Where's Jasmin?' she asked. 'Coming,' answered Laura briefly.

'He doesn't look like Barclay,' murmured Mrs. Emery.

'No,' said Laura, 'he doesn't.'

The object of their concern entered the room cheerfully and sat down. Mrs. Emery asked him how he liked Winnebago.

'Very much,' he replied.

'The fishing isn't as good as it used to be,' she said. 'Forty years ago it was excellent. And the shooting, too.'

Tony said he thought the fishing was pretty good, even now. He paused, and then added quietly, 'You knew my father, didn't you?'

'Yes, I did,' replied Mrs. Emery. 'We sold him the property for his camp. I knew your mother, too,' she added imperturbably. 'How is she?'

'Not very well. She has a cold.'

'That house was always damp,' said Mrs. Emery. 'You'll have to buy some kerosene stoves in the village. And some flannel sheets.'

She changed the subject by asking him whether he had been in London during the blitz. Tony replied in the affirmative.

'Do you think they'll bomb us too?'

'I don't know. I suppose they will if they can. But you won't have to worry,' he added with a smile; 'you can stay here. They won't bomb the Maine woods.'

'They might,' said Sandy, putting down the *Lewiston Sun*. 'One incendiary bomb in the right place would burn up the whole state.'

'Let's hope they're not bright enough to know it,' put in Jasmin.

'They know it all right,' said Tony.

'Willie Tinker says the State Police caught a spy two or three weeks ago,' said Jasmin, who had acquired this piece of gossip when she went to borrow the steak.

'Where?' said Laura.

'Some place on the coast.'

'Do you suppose they'll take our guns from us?' exclaimed Mrs. Emery in dismay.

'What for?'

'Well, they took them away from the British — shotguns, rifles, and everything.'

'I don't think they will,' said Sandy; 'not yet.'

'They ought to let us keep *one!*' exclaimed Mrs. Emery. 'You can't live here without a gun. We need them for porcupines. And I don't like the idea of being absolutely unprotected — you never know about those lumbermen.'

'Now, Mother,' protested Laura, 'you've lived here for fifty years, and you've never been accosted by a lumberman yet. They're absolutely harmless. I'm much more afraid of spies.'

'I'm afraid of mountain lions,' said Jasmin, 'but like Gran, I've never been lucky enough to be accosted by one. — Come on, Tony, let's go fishing. The wind's just right.'

Tony drained the rest of his drink and rose to his feet. He said good-bye, and Mrs. Emery asked him to come again. Laura was silent.

As the door closed behind him, Mrs. Emery said, 'I wouldn't

treat him that way, Laura. I think you're being rather foolish.'

'Do you?' murmured Laura.

Mrs. Emery added, 'He's an attractive boy, and I don't blame her for being in love with him. But I can't understand your attitude.'

'All right, Mother,' said Laura, 'you can't.'

After a short pause Mrs. Emery rose to her feet. 'I'm going to take a nap,' she announced briefly, as though she had had enough of the subject.

When she had gone, Sandy put down the *Lewiston Sun*. He crossed the room slowly and stood beside Laura, who was quietly weeping.

'Don't,' he said. The way she was crying was heartrending.

'Oh, Sandy, help me!' she wept. 'Do *something*!'

'What do you want me to do?'

He bent down and put his arm around her and held her while she wiped her eyes. He knew she was behaving stupidly, but his heart was torn.

'Stop it, Sandy — stop it somehow! Mother's not on my side — nobody's on my side. Please help me!'

'There's only one thing I can do,' he said, patting her shoulder.

'What?' she asked between sobs.

'I can go to Margot. — Do you want me to?'

'Yes — you'll have to. Tell her to go away — tell her anything! — but for God's sake get rid of Tony!'

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## *Chapter XVI*

SANDY opened the front door and met a cold blast of wind. He shivered with distaste and quickly shut the door behind him. He was not looking forward to the next half-hour, but he knew he had to go through with it. He got into a boat and rowed moodily down the shore, rehearsing what he was going to say to Margot with his face clouded with thought. As he approached the Dwight camp, he looked around to see if anyone had spotted him, but the only thing within hailing distance was a gull. Feeling relieved, he tied the boat to a cleat on the end of the wharf and walked slowly up the path.

He knocked twice before Tatine opened the door.

'Is Madame at home?' he asked briefly.

Tatine eyed him suspiciously. She was clothed in a strange assortment of woolen garments, some of which had belonged to Barclay Dwight. She was half dead with cold, and her nose was red, and her massive frame trembled as the wind from the lake blew in the open door.

'*Mais oui*,' she replied. 'Madame is ill in bed.'

She would not let him in, but remained where she was, her big feet planted firmly on the threshold.

Sandy exclaimed irritably, 'Is she too ill to see me?'

'I do not know,' replied Tatine immovably.

'Go and tell her I wish to speak to her,' said Sandy, lapsing into pigeon French in his irritation. '*Dépêchez-vous!*'

Recognizing the voice of authority, Tatine walked heavily indoors and he heard her speaking to Margot. A moment later

she reappeared, looking sulky and curious. She held open the door and indicated with a nod of her head that he was to go in. 'Madame is there,' she said, pointing to the downstairs bedroom. She stared at him as he walked past her, and he was conscious of the cordial dislike in her black eyes. He knew she was aching to find out why he was there, so he shut the door of the bedroom firmly behind him.

Margot was lying in the huge double bed she had shared with Barclay, surrounded with baby pillows. Sandy noticed that her sheets were pale pink crêpe-de-chine, and as the bed was made of birch logs with the bark still on them, the effect was oddly incongruous. Her bright curls were piled on top of her head and secured with a pink satin ribbon, and her bedjacket — also pale pink — was hung with little ermine tails. The air was heavy with perfume and stale cigarette smoke. She put down the French novel she was reading and greeted him.

'*Tiens!*' she said with a laugh, 'if it isn't Sandy! What a surprise!'

Sandy pulled up a chair and sat down beside the bed.

'Well, Margot,' he said dryly, 'how are you?'

'I think I am coming down with pneumonia,' she replied. Her voice now had a slight French accent, and it infuriated him because he knew it was about as *ersatz* as the rest of her. It would deteriorate, if she grew bored or angry, into the more wholesome accent of Trenton, New Jersey.

She considered him for a moment, and then exclaimed, 'You haven't changed at all! You are just the same. — *En effet, c'est extraordinaire!*' she murmured thoughtfully to herself. Sandy could have strangled her.

'Still the same old Sandy,' she said, 'the same lovable, foolish man. You will never learn . . . '

'I have no idea what you're talking about,' said Sandy.

'Still living in hope, still faithful!'

'I'd rather you didn't mention my affairs,' he said coldly.

'*Alors!*' she smiled, 'you do know what I'm talking about.—Laura is a bitch, Sandy. She made poor Roger's life utterly miserable—"this hell," he used to call it—and from what I hear, she's making a mess of yours.'

'She thinks you're a bitch, too,' Sandy informed her.

'Does she really?' said Margot, raising an eyebrow. 'I didn't know our dear Laura knew any bad words. She was always so sweet—*si bien élevée!* But perhaps she's more human now that she is middle-aged.'

Sandy gazed at Margot and wondered how it would feel to touch a woman with the intention of strangling her. Up till now he had never laid hands on a woman unless he wanted to make love to her. Margot grinned at him impudently.

'Don't let's quarrel, *mon vieux!*' she said. 'We have a lot in common, you and I. We were always the outsiders, in Winnebago.'

'Look here, Margot,' said Sandy, ignoring her plea for amity, 'I came here to have a few words with you about something.'

Margot's smile faded.

'I think you know what I mean,' he added, fixing her with his eyes.

'Are you referring to Jasmin's idiotic crush on my son?' she asked.

'Yes, but that's not what *we* call it—if you'd seen them together, you'd know that Tony is in love.'

Margot retorted that she had seen no evidences of it, but Sandy continued roughly: 'Jasmin is in love with him, but this affair must be stopped before it goes any farther. That's why I wanted to talk to you—you've got to help us.'

'You have nothing to worry about,' said Margot. 'Tony is not in love.'

The statement was so flat that Sandy gazed at her in fascination, wondering how anyone could be so positive. She was calmly smoothing the little ermine tails at her throat and he mar-

veled at her aplomb. She reminded him of a little bantam hen. She had the same jaunty carriage and plump bosom, the same impertinent expression.

'Tony has been in love with her for weeks,' he went on, finding his voice, 'and now the affair has reached a crisis. You can tell by looking at them, and—'

'If Tony was thinking of marrying her,' said Margot, 'he would have told me so. As I said before, he's not in love.'

'You're so damn sure, aren't you!' retorted Sandy in anger.

'I know my own son.'

'I wonder! That's what every woman thinks. — He has every intention of marrying Jasmin—and you don't want this marriage any more than Laura does.'

'I wouldn't hear of it!' agreed Margot with vigor.

'Then the only thing you can do is to send him away. If he doesn't see her for a while he may get over it.'

'I have no intention of sending him away,' she retorted with a laugh. 'How perfectly ridiculous! Why doesn't Laura send Jasmin away? Tony's going into the Navy, and I may not see him again for the duration.'

'Then go with him!'

'Why should I?' she flashed angrily—'why the devil should I? The Hawthornes and the Emerys think they own the lake—but they jolly well don't! I was driven out of here once before, and it's not going to happen again. This is my house, and I intend to stay in it. You can all go to the devil!'

'All right, but I've warned you,' said Sandy, rising.

Margot looked up at him with a smile of contempt.

'Did *la belle Laura* put you up to this?' she asked. 'I wouldn't be surprised.'

'No, she didn't,' lied Sandy.

Margot knew he was lying. 'You can tell her when you get home that I will never let Tony marry her brat. She needn't have any worry on that score.'

Instead of feeling reassured, Sandy was furious. 'I suppose you think Jasmin isn't good enough for him.— The feeling, my dear girl, is mutual. From what we've seen of him, he seems like a nice boy, but he couldn't be your son without being a heel of some sort. You're probably right—he's not taking Jasmin seriously. This thing will have to be stopped right away.'

Margot sat up in bed and her eyes sparkled with anger. 'Get out of here, Sandy,' she said harshly—'and don't come back! You people have made my life miserable for twenty years, and I've had enough of it. From now on I do as I please. I won't leave Winnebago, and I won't send Tony away—you can tell Laura that's my answer.'

Sandy opened the door and strode out, dislodging Tatine, who had been listening at the keyhole. This reminder of the cheap air of intrigue which had always surrounded Margot disgusted him so that he decided then and there never to let Jasmin marry Tony, even if he had to take her away himself.

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## *Chapter XVII*

SANDY rowed home again. He had accomplished very little—for he was quite sure Tony would see Jasmin if he felt like it, as long as she was within rowing distance—and he had laid himself and Laura open to insulting remarks from Margot. He was still boiling with fury as he approached Dirigo Point and saw Jasmin standing on the end of the wharf. He could tell by her immovable expression that she was waiting for him. He wondered where Tony was.

'Hello, Jasmin,' he said, shipping his oars, 'where's Tony?'

'He went down to the Outlet to get his mail,' replied Jasmin. She was very upset. Her eyes filled with tears and she said, 'Why did Mother act like that this afternoon?'

Sandy wound the painter around a cleat without replying.

'She was simply awful!' added Jasmin emotionally, dashing the tears out of her eyes. 'Tony was hurt, and said he wasn't coming to Dirigo Point any more. I told him he was silly—but I can't blame him!'

Sandy sat down on an upturned canoe and decided that he was probably having the worst afternoon of his life. He didn't know what to say to Jasmin.

'She never spoke to him all afternoon,' Jasmin continued wildly. 'I could have died with shame, because he was a guest in our house. I'm fed to the teeth. If she'd only tell me *why* she doesn't like him! —I think I'll write to Father,' she added, 'and tell him the whole story.'

'Now, wait a minute,' said Sandy. 'I wouldn't do that if I were you. Your mother has something on her side. You'd better go easy on her.'

'Why? — what reason has she for acting this way? — what have Tony and I done that's wrong?'

'Nothing,' agreed Sandy.

'Then why — why — why — ?' cried Jasmin frantically.

'Sit down, Jasmin,' said Sandy — 'sit down over there on the keel of that boat.'

'No, it's wet,' she objected.

'Well, sit down somewhere — I want to talk to you.'

Jasmin found a dry spot on the wharf and sat down. Her face was white and young and helpless and bewildered, and he wondered if he ought to do this to her, but he didn't want Laura to be hurt any more.

'Listen, Jasmin,' he said — 'listen to me. It's not really my place to tell you this, but I think you ought to know. I wanted your mother to tell you, but she wouldn't. — Do you know why she divorced your father?'

His voice was different from his usual half-banter and Jasmin was frightened. 'Why, yes!' she faltered — 'she divorced him for incompatibility.'

'That isn't true. They got along beautifully until — until the other woman came along.'

Jasmin grew paler.

'There was another woman — ?'

'Yes.'

'Who was it?'

'Margot — Mrs. Carteret.'

Jasmin stared at him with her lips parted. He saw her turn green, and for a moment he thought she was going to faint.

'Tony's mother . . .' she said finally in a low voice.

'Yes. That's why your mother's upset. So keep your shirt on.'

Jasmin clasped her hands tightly in her lap and looked at the

dancing waves beyond the wharf and the purple outline of South Mountain. He saw a dull flush creep over her face as the full impact of the scandal hit her. Then she turned to him. ‘What happened?’ she asked.

‘Plenty,’ said Sandy, ‘but I think I’ll leave out the details.’

‘No, tell me now. I want to know everything. Please, Sandy!’

‘What do you want to know?’ he said uneasily.

‘Who started it?’

‘Margot started it, and your father was weak enough to fall for it.’

‘Did Mother mention her as co-respondent?’

‘No—you don’t have to divorce a man for adultery in the State of Maine. She divorced him for incompatibility.’

‘That’s a relief,’ said Jasmin quietly.

A hermit thrush flew into the pine tree by the wharf and began to sing. The lovely cool notes floated through the late afternoon silence like water falling over stones. The air of Dirigo Point was fragrant with wood-smoke, for indoors Mrs. Emery was throwing pieces of birch bark on the fire in an effort to keep warm. Sandy could hear Loretta singing to herself on the porch of the guides’ camp, and Walter whistling for Roddy. It all seemed so safe and pleasant until he looked at Jasmin’s unhappy face. He thought grimly of all the things Margot had done in her time, ending with this, and he was consumed with rage.

‘God damn her soul!’ he said to himself.

‘No wonder Mother’s upset—but she’s only thinking of herself,’ said Jasmin. ‘I don’t think she ought to act this way. Of course she hates Tony’s mother, but she oughtn’t to spoil my happiness.’

Sandy shook his head. ‘She’s thinking of you—she doesn’t want you to marry Tony because he has bad blood in him.’

Jasmin flushed angrily and scrambled to her feet. ‘Tony’s all right. He’s not a wolf, if that’s what you’re implying. I thought you were on my side, but I see now that you’re not.’

'That's what your mother said,' returned Sandy. 'I don't know whose side I'm on—but I don't want you to have a row with your mother, and I don't want you to make the same mistake your father made by falling in love with Margot's son.'

'Why do *you* hate her so?' exclaimed Jasmin.

'I've just come from there,' he replied grimly. '— No, Jasmin, you'd better not marry into that family.'

Jasmin's eyes grew steely.

'I'm going to marry him,' she retorted. 'What you've just told me doesn't make any difference. I love him, and you and Mother can't stop me. — You're making too much of this. Father had an affair with Tony's mother—but so what? — What's infidelity, compared to selfishness? Nobody thought of me at the time of the divorce—whether I wanted to be separated from Father. — To hell with it!' she added with venom.

She left him before he could speak, and when he heard the front door slam behind her he reached for his creel and took out a flask. It had about two drinks in it and he drained them both.

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## *Chapter XVIII*

JASMIN strode through the living-room and went upstairs. As she gained the upper story, she could hear her grandmother exclaiming to her mother, 'Now what's the matter with her? Do you suppose she and Tony have quarrelled?'

'No,' said Laura, 'she's mad at me.'

'Why?'

'Because I wasn't pleased to see Tony this afternoon.'

'You *were* awfully rude to him!'

'I know, Mother, but I couldn't help it—I simply couldn't help it!'

Jasmin closed the door firmly and lay down on the bed. Her feelings were a mixture of shock and misery. It was all so horrible she couldn't even cry. The bitter disillusionment—for it was Roger's behavior which shocked her most—and the knowledge that Tony's mother had caused her mother's divorce—appalled her so that she felt weak and ill. As far as Laura was concerned, she was torn between pity and anger. Laura had suffered, but she could have made Roger behave.

As for Tony, she had no idea what he would think when she told him. She was desperately frightened, and she wouldn't feel safe until she knew whether it made any difference to him. Above the rustle of the trees outside the window rose the whine of an outboard, and she sprang to the window, but it was only Bert, returning from Middle Dam. With a bleak face she lay down again and tried to think calmly . . . One or two things were puzzling her. Why didn't her father marry Margot, if he was in love with her? —Also, why had she, Jasmin, been so dumb all these years? Looking back, she could see a thousand

little things—straws in the wind—which might have revealed the truth if she had been bright enough to recognize them.

At this point she heard footsteps on the stairs and held her breath. She wished she had locked the door, for Laura had a habit of coming in unannounced. But the footsteps paused hesitantly outside and she heard a low voice saying, 'Jasmin, are ye in there?' It was Bert.

'Yes, Bert,' she answered quietly, 'what do you want?'

'I got somethin' for ye. Open the door.'

She rose and let him in. Bert handed her an envelope. 'This is from your young man. He gave it to me down to the Outlet.'

Jasmin opened the letter quickly. It was very short.

'Dear Jasmin, Meet me on your wharf at eight o'clock. I want to talk to you.'

Her heart missed a beat and she felt a little sick. He had found out himself—he knew the whole story . . . She put the note back in its envelope.

'Is there any answer?' asked Bert dryly, but there was a gleam of sympathy in his eye. She wondered how much of this Bert knew—everything, probably.

'No, Bert,' she replied, 'there's no answer.'

The old man rose from the bed, where he had been sitting because he was tired from his trip to Middle Dam. 'Well, I guess I better git some supper.'

'Did you buy the sawmill?' she asked.

'Yes. They wanted an awful lot of money for it at first, but after a while I got 'em down to a reasonable amount. It's in good shape—it'll last us awhile, anyway. — That feller of yours is nice-lookin',' he added abruptly.

'Yes, isn't he,' agreed Jasmin.

'Don't take after his ma,' said Bert with a sour smile as he went out.

Jasmin slowly dressed for dinner. She bathed her eyes in a boric solution she found in the bathroom, and applied some

rouge because she still looked pale. Then she went downstairs.

'Hello, Jasmin,' said Laura.

'Hello, Mother,' she replied. She looked at her thoughtfully, wondering if she was frigid. That might have been the trouble. You never knew with most married couples.

'Let's play bridge after dinner,' said Mrs. Emery, unexpectedly finding two new packs of cards in her knitting bag. 'I didn't know I had these—and I'm just in the mood for bridge.'

'No,' said Jasmin firmly, 'I'm going out.'

Laura's jaw set itself in a hard line; and Sandy, who was mixing old-fashioneds at the other end of the room, looked up and said to her mildly, 'Must you, Jasmin? It's cold out on the lake tonight.'

'Yes,' she said, 'I must.'

Mrs. Emery changed the subject by turning on the radio.

The night was cold but windless, and the wide sky overhead was crowded with stars. Jasmin sat down in the shadow of a pine tree and waited. After ten minutes or so she heard the splash of a paddle, and Tony rounded Dirigo Point. 'Good evening!' he said. 'How are you?'

His voice sounded quite cheerful. Jasmin was nonplussed because she had expected him to be morose and distracted.

'What's happened, Tony?' she asked; '— why did you want to see me?'

'Did you get my note?' he said, stalling.

'Yes, of course, or I wouldn't be here. — What's the matter?'

'We can't talk here,' he replied. 'Get in the canoe.'

She obeyed him silently and he paddled swiftly toward the clearing on the other side of the cove. They beached the canoe and sat down, and he took her hand. He didn't say anything at first, and she supposed he was trying to think of some way of telling her without upsetting her. She knew she ought to help him, but she was speechless.

'Darling,' he said at last, 'I've got some news for you.'

'Yes, I know,' she said wearily.

'You couldn't possibly know,' he replied. 'The letter only came this evening.'

'What letter?' she exclaimed.

'What the devil is the matter with you?' he said curiously, staring at her in the darkness. '— I'm telling you I had a letter from the Navy Department.'

'The Navy — !' she echoed.

She had forgotten all about his orders.

'Yes — they've given me my commission, and I'm leaving for Boston tomorrow.'

'Oh!' said Jasmin in a stricken voice. For a moment she battled with the panic every woman feels at this announcement, and Tony said, 'Don't take it so hard, darling. I won't be going to sea for another three months.'

No, but it was the beginning of the end. She knew she was behaving badly, but this was the final straw. She broke down, and when Tony saw she was crying he was very upset. It wasn't like her to be hysterical, and he held her thoughtfully in his arms while he pondered.

'Look here, Jasmin,' he said after a while, 'is there anything else that's bothering you? — Come on, now, tell me!'

'No,' she lied, 'there's nothing else.'

'You're not telling the truth — I knew something was bothering you the moment you got in the canoe.'

'It's not important,' she replied — it was pointless to tell him the story now, on the eve of separation. She had read a great many articles on how to behave when you sent a man off to war, and you were supposed to be as cheerful as possible. She turned to him quickly. 'Let's go down to Willie Tinker's,' she exclaimed, for that was the only place within fifteen miles where you could find anything approaching gaiety. They needed gaiety.

'No,' replied Tony, 'we'll stay right here. — There *is* some-

thing on your mind, and I know what it is. Some God damned fool has told you the family scandal.'

'It wasn't a damned fool—it was Sandy,' she replied. 'He felt that things had come to the point where he had to. He told me this afternoon. How did *you* find out?'

'I've known quite a while. I came home one night and found Mother weeping, and Tatine said she was crying because I'd hurt her. When I asked her why the hell it was my fault, Tatine got mad and told me the whole story.'

'And why,' said Jasmin heavily, 'didn't you tell me?'

'Because I knew it would upset you.'

He put his arm around her again and drew her to him. She felt better, now that she knew how he was taking it. His voice sounded calm and matter-of-fact—a little dry, that was all. His kisses were unchanged.

'Tatine had no business to tell you—she's only a servant,' said Jasmin suddenly in a hard voice.

'Mother's spoiled her,' replied Tony. 'She takes plenty of liberties with us. I want to get rid of her, but Mother won't hear of it because the old girl adores her, and has no family, and would be homeless if we fired her.'

'Why didn't you shut her up?'

'I tried to, but you don't know Tatine. By the time I'd shut her up, I'd heard the whole story.'

'What, exactly, did she say?'

'She was pretty rough on your father,' replied Tony uncomfortably. 'She said he was a roué, a degenerate, and a confirmed drunk.'

'Father doesn't drink,' said Jasmin sharply. 'What else did she tell you?'

'She said that Mother was in love with him and he jilted her. Evidently he was going to marry her and then changed his mind.'

'It's a lie—all of it,' said Jasmin, without much conviction. She still hoped that her father's behavior had been exaggerated

by Sandy and Tatine, but the case against him looked extremely black.

'I only believe about half of what Tatine says,' replied Tony. 'Don't let it get you down. Sometimes married couples get themselves into these jams, and no one is really to blame.'

Perhaps not; but the fact remained that Roger had philandered and Margot had misbehaved.

Tony sensed what she was thinking, and he added uncomfortably, 'I think circumstances had a lot to do with it. Mother was bored and unhappy, and she wanted a little fun. She loves attention, and evidently my old man didn't give her much. He went fishing all day and left her alone.'

'Yes,' said Jasmin, 'that's what happened to Grandmother. But Gran had the sense to learn how to fish so that Grandfather would take her with him.'

Then she was sorry she had said it, because Tony was silent.  
'This is an awful mess,' she faltered.

'Yes,' he said, clearing his throat, 'but it has nothing to do with us. You've got to keep that in your mind all the time. *I do.*'

'But it has a *lot* to do with us!'

'No,' he replied firmly, 'it hasn't. — And while I'm down in Boston, you mustn't let anybody persuade you that you're not going to marry me because your mother hates my mother!'

'Oh, Tony!' she thought in despair. The future was going to be horrible, with Laura and Margot always at each other's throats.

'This hasn't made any difference to me,' he said soberly, 'and if you love me, it shouldn't make any difference to you. — Do you want to go through with it?'

'Yes, of course,' she said swiftly. He tightened his arms around her and their lips met. She clung to him, knowing that this marriage she had wanted more than anything in the world would take all the courage she had, and something more. But she loved him — and she was going through with it.

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## *Chapter XIX*

MRS. EMERY woke up with the birds. Dawn comes early in the north woods during June, and she lay there drowsily entertained by a chorus of chickadees and sparrows. It was wonderful to hear them again . . . wonderful as long as you didn't think. After a while she began to feel hungry, and she tried to find the will power to get up, hunt for the Sterno, and make herself a cup of tea. But it was nicer to lie there, listening to the busy notes of the wrens in the balsam tree under the window. She was trying to remember where Laura kept the Sterno when she heard a low sob in the next room. Laura was crying again.

She sounded distraught this morning, and Mrs. Emery sat up with her hand on her breast. She longed to go in and talk to her, but she was afraid that Laura didn't want her. Laura was crying with abandon because she thought everyone was still asleep.

'It isn't normal of her to take it this way,' thought Mrs. Emery. 'She's nearly out of her mind. What'll I do? — what can I say to her if I do go in there and speak to her? What *is* the trouble? — this isn't like her.'

After a few minutes Laura's grief subsided and Mrs. Emery lay down again while the sunlight filled the room and the morning wind sprang up on the lake and the sky deepened from pale blue to ultramarine.

At breakfast Laura was composed and silent. There were shad-

ows under her eyes and she seemed thinner — her skin was beginning to have a transparent look.

Mrs. Emery decided not to try to cope with the situation until she had had some fresh air and a little distraction. She suddenly announced that she was going fishing.

Sandy offered to row her, but she said No, thank you, she would take Bert. She rose from the table and hunted for her scarves. Then she put on an old gabardine windbreaker, and over that a heavy brown tweed ulster. When Bert appeared, she sent him to her own camp to find her hat. He came back with it and she slapped it on without looking in a mirror. The hat was a battered gray felt, trimmed with assorted wet flies. Sandy observed that it was the same old hat.

'This is its forty-sixth summer,' said Mrs. Emery, settling it more firmly on her head.

'You've got it on backwards, Mother, I think,' said Laura.

Mrs. Emery turned it around; and as she went toward the front door she met Jasmin coming downstairs.

'Hello, Gran!' murmured Jasmin, 'where are you off to?'

'I'm going fishing,' replied Mrs. Emery briefly.

She quickly left the house, followed by Bert, who was laden with steamer rugs and cushions and a long-handled net. He settled her comfortably in the rowboat, and then handed her her rod.

'Where to?' he asked.

'Down the shore to the Outlet,' she replied.

She stripped the line off the reel and began to cast. A shiver of pleasure ran down her spine as she felt the line slip easily through the guides — this was the panacea for all ills, a never-failing source of comfort. You grew older, and men lost their charm and women failed you, and your children grew away from you; but fishing was always the same.

'Gorry!' said Bert after a while, 'it's a pleasure to watch you fish.'

She was pleased with herself, for there were very few men of her age who could easily cast eighty feet of line without getting tangled up in it.

'Jasmin casts a nice fly,' added Bert, 'but she ain't got your style.'

'Her father knew how to fish,' remarked Mrs. Emery after a pause.

'Sure, he was a real good sport.'

There was another interval of silence, and then Bert said: 'That boy of hern is a nice, upstandin' feller. I thought he'd take after her, but he's polite and friendly. I met him down to the Outlet yestidy, and he talked to me fur quite some time — asked me all about his pa.'

Mrs. Emery felt that she ought not to discuss the ever-present subject of Margot with Bert, but she had made the mistake of mentioning Roger. Bert was never familiar; he simply knew too much.

'Now, there's a man I never could understand,' added Bert, referring to Barclay Dwight. 'He seemed like an awful milksop. If she'd been my wife I'd have locked her up in the house.'

'He was weak because he was in love with her,' murmured Mrs. Emery.

'That's another thing I can't figger out. How could any feller with sense run after a woman like that?' This time he was referring to Roger. 'Don't seem normal, somehow.'

'No,' agreed Mrs. Emery briefly. She changed the subject by complaining that they had rowed a quarter of a mile without raising a fish, and just as she said it a salmon flopped over the line. Bert chuckled.

'They allus come like that.'

Mrs. Emery cast again and the fish took the fly. There was an explosion in the water, and a silver body trembled for an instant above the waves and then fell back with a splash. 'Weigh about three pounds,' said Bert. This was a large fish for Winnebago.

Mrs. Emery felt contented and at peace with the world around her—the visible world of mountain, lake, and forest. In spite of a cold wind, the atmosphere was more pleasant in the boat than it was indoors at Dirigo Point. She landed the fish and Bert rowed slowly toward the Outlet.

When they were opposite Willie Tinker's, he said it was time for the mail, so they landed at the wharf and Bert vanished indoors. He was gone some time, and she amused herself by watching a family of sheldrakes bobbing along the waves a few hundred feet away. She was thinking what game little things they were—for the ducks were small and the lake was rough—when the door of Tinker's main camp opened and Roger Hawthorne came toward her down the path to the lake.

'Hello, Mrs. Emery!' he said cheerfully, 'how are you?'

Mrs. Emery looked at him in consternation, and for the first time in his life he heard her swear. 'My God, what are you doing here?'

'I came up for the fishing,' he replied blandly.

'Liar!' thought Mrs. Emery. Her astonishment at seeing him left her speechless. She was disgusted with him for coming. Undoubtedly he was having a rendezvous with Margot, which left her weak with anger and contempt.

'I'm sorry if I've upset you in any way,' he said stiffly, 'but after all, we live at different ends of the lake—'

'The lake's only five miles long,' she reminded him. 'Go away, Roger!'

'Why?' he parried. 'I don't see why I should.'

'You must think of Jasmin,' she said emotionally. 'She's your child—do you want to hurt her like this?'

'I am thinking of Jasmin,' he replied.

'No, you're not,' said Mrs. Emery flatly. 'You're only thinking of yourself and Margot.'

'Margot—!' he echoed.

'Yes— you came up here because you wanted to see Margot—

you forgot Jasmin entirely. She doesn't know a thing about the family scandal, and this is a disgusting way to break it to her.'

Roger looked at the distant shore and saw a gray plume of smoke rising from the Dwight camp. A strange expression went over his face, but he said nothing.

Mrs. Emery wanted to tell him what she thought of him, but before she could speak something occurred to her. She thought hard for a moment, and then her anger changed to a look of determination.

'Roger!'

'Yes?'

'Go away and take Jasmin with you!'

'Why?' he asked in surprise. 'What's the matter with Jasmin?'

'She's in love—'

'Yes, I know—but who's the man?'

Mrs. Emery told him. She couldn't help a feeling of satisfaction when she saw him blanch.

'How the devil did that happen?' he said uncomfortably.

'I don't know—they met each other at a dinner party somewhere. It's been going on for several months.'

Roger sat down on the mooring post at the end of the wharf. He looked so disturbed that Mrs. Emery was filled with uncharitable joy. It was time that he began to suffer for his behavior. Unfortunately he was still dowered with that amazing charm. If she wasn't careful she might succumb to it again. In the past she had sometimes found him irresistible. She must not forget that he had treated them all abominably. She looked at him now with a frown of distaste, planning her next move.

'Roger,' she said finally, 'did you come by car or by train?'

'By car,' he replied. 'I left it in the village because there's something the matter with the clutch.'

'Get it fixed immediately and take Jasmin down to Vinal Haven.'

Roger had no intention of going to Vinal Haven. He said that

it would take several days to fix the car, and besides, he doubted if Sophie would have him in the house.

'Oh, yes, she will,' said Mrs. Emery, whose mind was made up. She had no idea whether her eldest daughter had room for Roger, but she was determined to send him there. 'She always said the divorce was Margot's fault — she was on your side. Now be sensible, Roger, and send her a telegram.'

Roger did not answer her. He returned to the subject of Jasmin.

'When she met this boy, did she have any idea who he was?'

'Not the slightest,' replied Mrs. Emery.

'What have you told her?'

'Nothing. Laura doesn't want her to know for some reason.'

'That's foolish,' said Roger; but he was puzzled, and after a pause he added, 'I don't see why Jasmin hasn't found out herself why Laura and I split up.'

'Neither do I,' said Mrs. Emery. 'You'd think someone would have told her by this time. — Laura's desperately upset,' she added grimly.

'I'm not too pleased myself,' he said.

'You will take Jasmin away, won't you?'

'I suppose I'll have to.'

'That's fine! Can't you leave this afternoon?'

She was eager to get him out of Winnebago before Laura saw him.

'What'll I do,' he exclaimed, 'if Jasmin says she won't go to Vinal Haven?'

'You'll have to make her,' said Mrs. Emery.

'I can't *make* Jasmin do anything — she's over eighteen.'

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Emery, feeling pleased at the turn events had taken, 'you'd better tell her the truth — it's time she knew it anyway.'

'No,' said Roger, 'Laura wouldn't like it.'

That was just an excuse; she knew his spirit quailed at the thought of telling Jasmin anything about himself and Margot. Roger started to explain that it was Laura's place, not his, to tell the story when Mrs. Emery caught sight of Bert and gave him a warning frown.

'You get that car fixed,' she concluded firmly, 'and take her down there as soon as you can. If you let her stay here another day something dreadful may happen.'

'— You mean they'll elope. — I have no intention of letting her marry him—that's out, anyway,' exclaimed Roger. 'I'll take her to Vinal Haven as soon as I can.'

'Yes, you must,' said Mrs. Emery. She wanted to add, '— And don't come back,' but she couldn't. The lake was public property. He had a perfect right to live at Willie Tinker's if he chose.

Roger looked at her with a half smile. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Emery. Don't think too badly of me—I have my side of it, too, you know!'

Breeding kept her from saying what she thought of him in front of Bert. She acknowledged his good-bye with a gesture of her free hand as the boat moved away from the wharf. Roger looked at his mother-in-law with a bemused expression as she began to strip the line off her reel—she was wearing that wonderful, silly old hat, but during the last twenty years she had changed the flies. Unfortunately, he was fond of her, and it was a pity that she disliked him so.

Mrs. Emery returned home in a state of indignation. She found Laura in the toolhouse cleaning a gun. Laura received the news that Roger was staying at Willie Tinker's calmly, but instead of growing pale, to Mrs. Emery's surprise she grew quite pink.

'Oh!' she said queerly, 'is he?'

Mrs. Emery added that she was furious at him for coming to Winnebago, but Laura said, 'Never mind, Mother — it doesn't upset me.'

'Did you know he was coming?' said Mrs. Emery.

'No, of course not,' said Laura. 'Why should I know?'

She finished cleaning the gun and Mrs. Emery, who was exhausted emotionally, sat down on an old wooden tub which had once contained lobsters.

'How did he look?' asked Laura.

'Very well,' replied Mrs. Emery, without adding that he looked extraordinarily young for a man of fifty.

Laura wiped her hands on a piece of cotton waste and carefully put the gun away in its case. 'Did he say how long he was going to be in Winnebago?' she asked.

'I think he was planning to stay quite a while,' replied Mrs. Emery, 'but I persuaded him to take Jasmin to Vinal Haven.'

'You did — !' exclaimed Laura. 'How did you manage that?'

'I told him the whole story and he was very upset. He said he wouldn't think of letting her marry Tony — simply wouldn't allow it. I'm sure you're glad to know that.'

Laura grew much paler. Her body trembled and she steadied herself against the workbench.

Mrs. Emery was absorbed in what she and Roger had said to each other, and she failed to notice Laura's pallor. 'I'm furious at him for coming up here,' she continued. 'I think his behavior is simply incredible — but I must say I was glad to see him.'

'Yes,' said Laura in a strained voice. 'Jasmin is his responsibility. He ought to take her away.'

Mrs. Emery rose from the lobster barrel. 'Are you going to tell Jasmin her father's here, or shall I?'

'I'll tell her,' said Laura. 'Send her out here.'

Mrs. Emery left the toolhouse, and when the door closed, Laura relaxed against the workbench and buried her face in her hands.

'Oh, my God, Roger!' she murmured.

Why had he come? She had been very careful in her letters, and there was nothing in any of them which could have given him the impression that she wanted to see him. That was not to be thought of. It was Margot — undoubtedly — who had lured him to Winnebago. 'It's my own fault,' she thought. 'I was cold with him that day we had cocktails. I was almost rude to him. He took me at my word, and I have only myself to thank for this . . . Oh, God!'

Jasmin opened the door.

'Did you want to see me, Mother?' she asked coolly.

Laura straightened. 'Yes. I have some news for you.'

'Have you?' Jasmin's voice was uninterested and withdrawn, and Laura could feel enmity rising between them like a plate-glass wall. Laura gripped the workbench with her hands and said quietly, 'Your father's here — he's down at Willie Tinker's.'

'Father — here?' exclaimed Jasmin in astonishment, losing most of her detachment. 'Why?'

'I don't know,' replied Laura, avoiding Jasmin's eyes.

'Did he write you he was coming?'

'No.'

'Funny that he didn't write to me!' said Jasmin, bewildered.

'He wants you to go to Vinal Haven with him — and you've got to go! You simply must, whether you want to or not.'

Jasmin's face grew blank and reserved again and a chill swept over the toolhouse. Laura's expression was one of mingled despair and determination.

'He came all the way up here to get you, and you can't say no. Please don't argue with me about this, Jasmin — '

Jasmin interrupted her. 'Have I said I wasn't going?'

'No, but — '

'You haven't given me a chance to speak. — I'm perfectly willing to go, if I don't have to stay too long.'

Laura was surprised, and Jasmin's lips parted in a rueful smile.

'You didn't expect that, Mother, did you!' she said bitterly.

Before Laura could reply she opened the door and walked out without telling her that Tony had gone to Boston. Laura watched her as she strode down the path under the sunlit birches and entered the house.

"They've had a row," she decided, "—but why didn't she tell me? — Oh, God! why does she have to act that way?"

Laura sank down on the lobster barrel and clasped her hands. She brooded over Jasmin for a moment, and then her mind flew back to Roger.

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## *Chapter XX*

**T**HE WATER in Rockland harbor was a clear, vivid blue, shot with light wherever a wave caught the reflection of the sky. Three yachts and a Coast Guard cutter were lying off the jetty where lobsters and gasoline were for sale, and from the shipyard a few hundred yards away came the rattle of pneumatic drills. The day was warm and summery and the trees on the headland above the harbor were in full leaf. Jasmin observed to Roger that the heat was very pleasant after the cold in Winnebago.

'Yes, isn't it,' agreed Roger absently.

Jasmin hung over the rail as the Vinal Haven boat backed away from the wharf and turned her blunt prow toward the open sea, thoughtfully watching the white water curling under the port side of the boat. She was silent, but not as quiet as Roger, who was afflicted with nostalgia. The smell of the sea, the motion of the boat, and the whole panorama of Rockland harbor brought back a host of disturbing memories. And whenever he turned his head he could see Vinal Haven—a long smudge of green and yellow—glimmering through the mist on the horizon. He was reminded at every turn of his engagement to Laura, of the summer when he had fallen in love with a girl who—presumably—loved him.

While Roger mused Jasmin drummed her fingers on the rail and looked at the gannets. A vision of Margot in her father's arms had pursued her all the way from Winnebago. At times it

made her slightly sick, and at others, when she looked at Roger, she could not believe that he had ever philandered with a woman under her mother's nose. He was too suave, too punctilious, and too much in command of his emotions.

'What are you staring at?' said Roger, conscious of the scowl on her face.

'The gannets,' replied Jasmin.

'What's the matter with them?'

'Nothing.'

Roger said she looked pale and wan and handed her a bar of chocolate. 'Eat that — you didn't have much lunch.'

Jasmin ate some of it and changed the subject. 'It's going to rain tomorrow,' she announced with depressing finality.

'What makes you think so?'

'There isn't a cloud in the sky, and that usually means dirty weather ahead. And it never fails to rain when I visit Aunt Sophie.'

'Good Lord, but you're depressing!' said Roger. 'I want to go to Isle au Haut tomorrow in the sloop.'

'Take me with you?'

'I thought you said it was going to rain.'

'That won't matter — sailing in the rain is amusing sometimes.' She was anxious to be alone with him because she wanted to tell him how she felt about the whole sordid business.

Roger looked down at her with a smile. 'You certainly are your mother's child — she always liked sailing in the rain.'

The boat left the Rockland breakwater astern and began to sway gently with the longer swell of the open sea. In a little while they would be in Vinal Haven with its memories and associations; and Roger grew more and more silent. Laura would have been astonished if she had known how affected he was by the Vinal Haven pier. He caught sight of his former sister-in-law in the crowd of lobstermen and summer residents waiting for the boat and she looked a trifle puzzled.

She greeted him, however, as he came down the gangplank with a cordial grin. ‘Hello, Roger, how are you?’

He knew she wondered why he was there, but she couldn’t ask him because they were surrounded by most of the residents of Vinal Haven, and Jasmin was present. She kissed Jasmin affectionately and led the way shoreward, chatting volubly about nothing.

Sophie’s house was on the ocean side of Vinal Haven, facing the blue expanse of the North Atlantic. It had no architectural style whatever, having been built at a time when American taste was at a low ebb, but it was comfortable and had a certain homely charm. It was an ugly shade of brown, but Sophie never thought of painting it a more cheerful color because Gifford, her late husband, had painted it that color thirty years ago. There was a plantation of spruce trees behind the house, and between the front porch and the sea was a garden filled with a heterogeneous assortment of perennials, annuals, and cooking herbs. Sophie relieved the dull brown house by planting salmon-pink geraniums in the window-boxes, and there was a line of nasturtiums in front of the porch.

Roger viewed the house with a feeling of shock. It affected him more than his first sight of Winnebago yesterday, because he had done most of his courting on the front porch. The old canvas hammock, he noticed, had been replaced by a rattan sofa upholstered in some shiny blue material.

Sophie gazed at him quizzically. ‘I’ve put you in the west bedroom, Roger — is that all right?’

‘Sure,’ mumbled Roger. It was the room in which he and Laura had slept after they were married.

Sophie added that Jasmin was in the little room at the end of the hall, and Jasmin took the hint and went upstairs. Sophie looked at Roger inquiringly.

‘She’s having a love affair,’ replied Roger briefly.

‘Is she?’ exclaimed Sophie, annoyed with Laura for withhold-

ing this piece of information. ‘Who’s the man? — I can tell by your expression that he’s dreadful.’

‘The boy’s all right. I mean by that, he’s perfectly eligible, but —’

Roger broke off with a gesture of helplessness and began again. ‘The long arm of coincidence has dealt us a body blow. She’s in love with Margot’s son.’

Sophie was appalled, but she took the news more objectively than the rest of the family. ‘That’s ironic!’ she exclaimed, ‘— sounds like a Greek drama.’

Roger replied sourly that Greek drama ought to be confined to the stage.

‘Where did she meet him?’ asked Sophie.

‘I don’t know — at some party. This is what comes of not telling her the truth long ago. He’s in Winnebago, and we had to get Jasmin out of there before she eloped with him.’

‘What do you want me to do?’ asked Sophie after a pause, ‘— keep her down here all summer?’

‘You can’t keep her here if she refuses to stay,’ replied Roger. ‘I thought it was rather foolish to send her away, but Laura insisted. Two weeks of sea air won’t change Jasmin’s mind if she’s really in love with him.’

‘Do you want her to marry him?’

‘God, no!’ said Roger.

He paced up and down the room, jingling the coins in his pocket and Sophie watched him thoughtfully. This was retribution, but she couldn’t help feeling sorry for him. This was a heavy price to pay for his one lapse from grace. Unlike the rest of the family, she had forgiven him during the Margot episode because he was young and because there was a war on, and many people were suffering from moral turpitude, and Margot was so oversexed that any man would have had trouble keeping her in bounds . . .

'Sophie,' exclaimed Roger, pausing in front of her, 'do you want me to go away again?'

'No — why should I?' she answered in surprise.

'I thought it might be awkward for you to have me here. What will the neighbors say when they hear you're entertaining your divorced brother-in-law?'

'To hell with the neighbors,' said Sophie briefly.

'I'd better stay,' he added slowly, 'because I have to tell Jasmin why she can't marry Tony.'

'Hasn't anybody told her yet?' exclaimed Sophie.

'No,' said Roger; 'they left that little chore up to me.'

'Oh, good Lord!' said Sophie.

Roger handed her a cigarette.

'Why is it,' he said warmly, 'that no one in your family ever tells anything that really matters?'

'I don't know,' said Sophie, 'but they never do.'

She rose, and as he looked at her she had a sudden resemblance to Laura, although her hair was grayer and the bone structure of her face was not as lovely. He felt the same dull pain around his heart which had plagued him since his first sight of Rockland harbor.

'Roger,' murmured Sophie, 'you mustn't take it too hard! . . . I can imagine that Mother and Laura are beside themselves. I think you'd better tell Jasmin the truth as soon as you can. It's the only way.'

'Yes, I think you're right,' he agreed.

The living-room table was in Sophie's line of vision, and to her horror she realized there was a picture of Laura in her wedding dress beside the lamp. She had meant to put it away, but something had distracted her, and there it was.

Roger turned to her. 'May I go sailing in the sloop tomorrow?'

'Yes, of course,' replied Sophie. 'I've just had it rigged with new sails — it's in good shape.'

'I think I'll take Jasmin with me.'

'That's a good idea — you'll have plenty of privacy on the ocean. — Would you like a drink now?' she added as an after-thought.

'No, thank you,' he replied, 'I think I'll go for a walk.'

He started for the door, and as he passed the living-room table he saw Laura's face surrounded with a cloud of tulle.

Isle au Haut was only a presence on the sea. There was a green veil of mist between the ocean and the sky which was barely visible — one moment it was there, and the next it was gone. The effect was haunting, because the immense island rising from the water had no substance; it was a nether world, populated by dream-like gulls and the ghostly music of bell-buoys.

Jasmin, who was at the tiller, looked at it for a while and then said quietly: 'Let's not go there after all — it's so lovely just as it is. I'd rather not spoil it by having it turn out to be real, and I don't want to see the general store and the summer residents.'

Roger did not care where they went as long as they anchored in some quiet bay where he could talk to her. 'Let's go back there,' he said, pointing to the Fox Island Thoroughfare. 'I remember a small harbor where we used to picnic.'

'This trip is getting nowhere,' he added to himself, as she brought the sloop around. 'We've been sailing for two hours, and neither of us has had the courage to speak. She knows I want to talk to her — she'd be a moron if she didn't — and she wants to talk to me. I suppose she hopes she can persuade me to let her marry Tony.'

They sailed back again toward the Fox Island Thoroughfare, while the gulls followed them on immaculate wings and the dolphins played hide and seek in the waves beside the boat.

They entered a small cove and dropped the anchor overboard. In the sudden silence which followed they could hear the gulls creaking overhead and cows lowing from a near-by farm. The smell of the spruce trees above the rocks was mingled with salt air and seaweed. Jasmin asked him if he was hungry.

'No, not especially,' he replied. 'Did you bring anything to drink?'

'Beer — want some?'

'Yes.'

She opened the picnic basket and took out a bottle of beer and a lobster sandwich. Roger knew the moment had come to unburden his mind, but it was Jasmin who spoke first.

'Did you ever come here with Mother?' she said bluntly.

'Yes, I did,' replied Roger.

'I suppose all of this,' she went on, '— North Haven and Isle au Haut and the rest of it—reminds you of your engagement. It must be depressing to come back to a place where you've been terribly in love, when you're not in love any more.'

'I hadn't given it much thought,' lied Roger. 'It doesn't affect me as much as it would have ten or fifteen years ago. — What's that thing of Tennyson's? — "And after many a summer dies the swan."'

"The woods decay, the woods decay and fall, The vapors weep their burthen to the ground, Man comes and tills the fields and lies beneath, And after many a summer dies the swan."

'How did you know all that?' murmured Roger in surprise.

'I had to memorize it at school. — There's another bit that makes me think of Isle au Haut—"I wither slowly in thine arms, Here at the quiet limit of the world."'

Roger repeated the lines to himself with a feeling of numbness. The whole ocean was teeming with memories, and Jasmin was rubbing salt into an old wound.

'It must be rather like dead sea fruit,' she added.

‘What are you talking about?’

‘Coming back to this cove must taste like dead sea fruit.’

‘It’s not important,’ he replied coolly.

‘I want to talk about you and Mother,’ continued Jasmin immovably. ‘I never have. Don’t you think it’s about time I did?’

‘Yes, if you like,’ he said evenly. ‘I was going to bring up the subject myself later.’

‘Why did you leave her? — *was* it incompatibility?’

‘I didn’t leave her,’ said Roger sharply, forgetting himself, ‘— she left me.’

‘Not really — you neglected her. You left her alone so much that finally she told you to get out and stay out.’

‘How do you know all these things, Jasmin?’ retorted Roger. ‘Who told you I neglected her?’

‘I know a lot! But some of it needs an explanation. I don’t get it.’

‘Don’t get what?’ parried Roger grimly.

‘How you could sink so low,’ she replied.

She was sitting with her back against the mast, and her face was pale and defiant. She refused to look at him and kept her eyes on the still, green water between the boat and the shore.

‘You may know all the facts,’ he replied slowly, ‘but there are some things, apparently, you don’t understand.’

‘I don’t understand any of it,’ she retorted. ‘Why did you have an affair with — with another woman — so soon after you were married? — Weren’t you in love with Mother?’

‘Yes, of course I was in love with your mother!’

‘Then I can’t see why you played around with someone else. Why *did* you?’

‘I don’t know,’ he replied helplessly; ‘— why does anybody do anything? I suppose you can say I lost my head. But I never stopped loving your mother for a minute. And that’s one of the things, my sweet,’ he said dryly, ‘that you are still too young to understand.’

'You never thought of me,' she added resentfully. 'You were selfish about the whole thing. You might have controlled yourself for my sake.'

Roger was appalled by the bitterness in her voice. For some reason he had never dreamed that she was affected this way by the divorce. He wanted to comfort her by putting his arm around her, but her slender body was rigid with anger and unhappiness.

'Jasmin!' he protested, 'you mustn't feel this way. I *did* think of you—I begged your mother not to leave me—but she insisted on getting a divorce.'

'She had plenty of reasons . . .' said Jasmin.

'She was like you—she couldn't understand how a man can have an affair with a woman and still love his wife.'

Jasmin answered him with a short laugh, and he lapsed into silence. This was all so different from what he had planned that he did not know what to do or say next. She had taken things into her own hands and left him stranded.

'I wish you'd listen to me for a moment,' he said warmly.

She shook her head. 'You ruined Mother's life with all that stupid business—and now you've spoiled mine. Do you realize what you've done to me?'

'Yes, I know all about it,' replied Roger. 'But you mustn't marry that boy.'

'Why not?' she demanded angrily.

'I won't let you marry him.'

'You can't stop me! Everybody says I'll make Mother miserable, but she's unhappy anyway. And as for you, I don't think you have any right to tell me what to do. You dumped me years ago.'

It was Roger's turn to be bitter. While he was thinking of a suitable retort, she began to cry. She leaned her head against the mast and tears streamed down her cheeks . . . He thought of Laura, years ago, sitting on the deck of Gifford's old black sloop, with her legs tucked under her and her hair blowing in the wind.

He had kissed her that afternoon for the first time, and now this was the result.

'Jasmin,' he faltered, 'please don't — !'

'Oh, God, why did I come?' she exclaimed. 'I've said all the wrong things. I wanted to get you on my side, and now I've ruined my chances. I guess I'll have to fight this battle alone.'

'I don't want you to be unhappy, but you can't marry Tony.'

'I must marry him,' she replied. 'We have everything in common — we like the same things — the same places — we're never bored when we're together. It's the only real companionship I've ever had — I know I'm doing the right thing.'

'But he's younger than you are!' protested Roger. 'You ought to marry a man around thirty, who'll look after you.'

'I've thought it over very carefully. He's only three years younger. Less than three, actually.'

'You'd be insane if you married him.'

Jasmin's lips curled resentfully. 'You're just like Mother — you're thinking only of yourself. You don't want me to marry him because you're afraid I'll complicate matters for you.'

He started to protest, but she cut him off.

'You're afraid I'll spoil your little plans,' she went on quietly, although she was almost beside herself. 'I know why you came to Winnebago, and so does everybody else. How could you do it, when you knew Mother was there!' she said scornfully. 'Couldn't you have found some other place besides Winnebago to meet each other?'

'What do you mean?' said Roger slowly; 'what are you talking about?'

'You and Mrs. Carteret.'

Roger stared at her for a moment, and then drew in his breath. He should have expected this, but it came as a total surprise. Of course she thought he was after Margot again — anybody would.

'Listen, Jasmin,' he said firmly, 'I want to talk to you about

this thing. Mrs. Carteret and I had a flirtation years ago, but we haven't seen each other since. I had no idea she was in Winnebago or I wouldn't have come. You're wrong if you think I wanted to see her.'

'Then why did you come?'

'Can't you guess?'

'No.'

Roger paused, and Jasmin looked at him inquiringly. The cow-bells were chiming softly above the wash of the sea, and she thought in passing that she would never hear them again without remembering this afternoon.

'Jasmin,' he said finally, 'I came for a variety of reasons. Some of them you might not understand, but there's one you'll appreciate.'

'Why?'

'Because you're going through the same thing yourself. — I came up to Winnebago because I wanted to see your mother. I'm in love with her, and I want to marry her.'

The oily water whispered along the sides of the sloop and the afternoon breeze stirred in the rigging while Jasmin turned this over in her mind. She knew he was telling the truth, because his eyes were haunted.

'It wasn't Margot I came to see,' added Roger quietly, 'it was you, and your mother.'

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## *Chapter XXI*

THE AIR was growing warmer as June progressed, and the trees outside the porch were in full leaf. Laura opened the door and looked out at the curtain of new green between the house and the lake. The excitement of spring was over. In a week or so the calm, flat days would begin when there was no fishing except in the pools on the river, and the woods were full of brooding sunlight, and Loretta's scarlet runner beans beside the guides' camp began to send out pale green tendrils. Laura viewed the approaching summer with misgivings. She was afraid it was going to be an unhappy one for everybody.

She pulled herself together with a shake, and decided to go for a walk. There was no sense in brooding over trouble when the sunlight was falling through the birches on the rose-red turf and the trilliums were blooming beside the front steps. Sandy was asleep on the living-room sofa and her mother and Jasmin had gone to the village. She walked idly down the front steps and took the path that led to the old logging road along the river, followed by Roddy, who issued from his cave under the front porch and joined her.

The air in the woods was fresh with the scent of resin and new green leaves. She dawdled along the path, stooping from time to time to hunt for checkerberry vines in the thick moss under the trees. Once she found a white lady-slipper, but she left it alone because it was so lovely shining through the dim twilight of the woods. The checkerberry vines were more abundant, so she picked a large handful for the house.

After a while she came to the fork in the road which led to

the pigeon trap, but she went on, wandering aimlessly down the mossy road. She had no particular objective; she was merely walking because she was restless and the woods were warm and pleasant. It was the first time in a year she had been on the old logging road, and she noticed several new windfalls, a piece of corduroy across a marshy spot in need of repair, a familiar birch painfully bent by last year's snows. She was thinking how peaceful the woods were that afternoon, and how pleasant it was to be alone in them, when suddenly she rounded a bend in the road and came upon Roger, who was sitting on a fallen log with a gun across his knees.

He did not see her at first, and it was only when Roddy ran toward him with a low growl that he looked up.

'Hello,' said Laura, at a loss.

'Good afternoon!' he smiled, 'how are you?'

Laura pointed to the gun in his lap. 'What are you doing with that? — the partridge season won't be open for three months.'

'I was trying to get up enough courage to go down to the camp and ask you to let me shoot clay pigeons.'

'We're out of them,' said Laura shortly. 'Why don't you shoot a crow?' She was annoyed with him for coming back from Vinal Haven. He had been there less than three days.

Roger shook his head and said it wasn't imperative for him to shoot anything. He pointed to the green vines in her hands.

'What are you doing with those?' he asked, '— playing wood-nymph?'

'No,' she returned coolly, 'I was trying to make a centerpiece for the dining-room table.'

'Don't be cross with me, Laura,' he pleaded. 'I came back here because Jasmin wanted me to. She was very unhappy, and when I found Tony wasn't here, I thought it was all right.'

'It doesn't matter to me what you do,' she replied.

He patted the log beside him. 'Sit down and talk to me, Laura.'

'No, I'm going for a walk. I need some exercise.'

'Then may I come with you?'

She knew she ought to tell him to go away and leave her in peace, but it sounded rude. There was a look of pleading in his eyes, and her heart gave a sudden twitch. Roger rose to his feet.

'Come on, Laura,' he said quietly.

'Very well,' she replied weakly. 'Where do you want to go?'

'Let's walk to the old logging camp. I'm thirsty, and I'd like a drink out of the spring.'

He tucked the shotgun under his arm and led the way down the familiar path. It seemed hardly possible that she was alone with him now, after all the bitterness and heartache of the past twenty years.

'These blazes need re-cutting,' he said, breaking the silence. 'It would be difficult to follow them at night. They're so weather-beaten now you can hardly see them.'

'They'd also be hard to follow in a snowstorm,' agreed Laura. 'I must have Walter come out and fix them.'

'Sometime I must come up here in winter,' added Roger. 'We always used to say we would.'

'I did come once, alone,' said Laura. 'It was divine. So beautiful, and so utterly different. Everything white and still and cold, with brilliant sunshine . . . The horses that draw the lumber sleds have bells on their collars—big, heavy ones like cowbells—and you can hear them chiming across the snow.'

'Sounds wonderful,' said Roger. 'I'm sorry I missed it—sorry you came alone.'

They were now at the top of the hill which led down to the clearing, and they could see a pool of sunshine ahead of them where the trees had been felled for the old logging camp.

'You see,' murmured Laura as he paused, 'it isn't any different. It looks just the same.'

'I am appalled by the way everything looks just the same,' said Roger, leading the way down the hill.

There was nothing she could do now but follow him, although she knew she was being weak. It was humiliating to be so weak — to feel so helpless — with a man who had once, if not exactly ruined your life, at least made a mess of it.

The clearing was warm and sunny. A lone veery was singing above the rustle of the wind in the birch trees, and a woodpecker was at work on a rotting pine. Laura looked into the spring. The unbelievably clear water was bubbling softly and monotonously out of a bed of white sand. She could see her face framed in watercress and it was distressingly pale.

'Come and sit down, Laura,' said Roger. 'I want to talk to you.'

Laura sat down a few feet away from him on a bank of moss. 'You're always saying you want to talk to me — but I don't think there's much to say — do you?'

'First of all, I want to explain why I came back from Vinal Haven.'

'You've already done that.'

'No, I haven't. I said that Jasmin wanted to come, but it wasn't wholly true . . . You know why I'm here, Laura, without my having to go into it.'

Laura laid the checkerberry vines on the ground and twined her hands together in her lap. Roger moved across the clearing and sat down beside her. His physical nearness was almost more than she could bear. 'It must feel like this,' she thought with a dim feeling of panic, 'when you're drowning. They say there's a moment when you don't care . . . Why can't I feel more bitter toward him?' The veery's throbbing notes poured through the quiet afternoon, and when the bird's lovely phrasing came to an end, Laura could hear more veeries singing far away and a deer moving on the other side of the ridge.

'Laura . . .'

'Yes, Roger?'

'Please talk to me! These silences of yours are making it so difficult . . . Laura, are you still angry and hurt?'

'Not any more. It's difficult to keep hate alive for twenty years.'

'Would you like me to tell you,' he went on, 'that I'm eaten with remorse? — because I am, if that's any comfort to you.'

'How foolish!' said Laura. 'There's no use worrying over the past.'

'Do you think you could forgive me?' he persisted.

'I *have* forgiven you — long ago,' she replied simply, but her voice had no emotion in it and gave the impression that she had forgiven him because she had ceased to care what he did.

'Laura,' he said, 'what about Sandy?'

'Well — what about him?'

'Are you going to marry him?'

'I may — but do you think you have any right to ask me that question?'

'Yes,' he retorted, 'because of Jasmin's future.'

Laura gave a shrug. 'She's over age — it doesn't matter what I do now.'

'Are you in love with him?' he asked bluntly.

'Yes,' she replied, but Roger knew she wasn't telling the truth. She turned her eyes away.

'You can't marry him!' protested Roger.

'I'm going to,' she assured him. 'He's one man in a thousand. He'd rather die than hurt anybody, and I need someone like that.'

There was a stress on the word 'need' which Roger heard grimly. Very well, he had been thoughtless years ago, but this was *now*. He said warmly that she would never be satisfied with mere kindness — she needed love, and passion, and emotional fulfillment. He knew Sandy couldn't give them to her.

'I also need companionship,' said Laura bitterly.

'But we had plenty of that at first!' he exclaimed. 'The last summer, I'll admit, I left you alone too much — but it would never have happened again — '

'As I said before,' exclaimed Laura swiftly, 'it's foolish to bring up the past. Maybe I *was* too hasty when I divorced you, but the harm is done. Both of us were in the wrong, but there's not much we can do about it now.'

'I think you're wrong,' he said quietly.

Laura gazed stubbornly at the checkerberry vines in her lap. She had twined them into a little wreath, and she looked at it admiringly, as though she had entirely missed the implication in his voice. Roger took the wreath away from her and laid it on the ground.

'Look at me, Laura!'

She turned her eyes blandly toward him, but the ruse failed. A low flush crept over her cheeks, and although her eyes were steady, her voice was uneven. 'No, Roger—I don't want to hear what you're going to say. I stopped caring for you, years ago.'

Roger tightened his grip on her hand. 'Dearest, please listen to me! There's no use—why don't you give in?'

'Why don't I?' thought Laura wildly. She was in the middle of a cold, dark lake and water was surging around her. He must have guessed that, with the dreadful clairvoyance of a husband.

'I want another chance,' he said.

Her heart was fluttering like the poplar trees on the other side of the clearing, and terror struck her. She had not meant to give in so easily, but every time she looked at him—at the face she had once loved better than anything else in the world—the blood left her veins.

'I'm weak,' she said at last in a low voice, '—I'm weak, and so are you. We're both spineless and we always were.'

'We're not weak at all. We're simply admitting that we made a mistake.'

'I'm not so sure it was a mistake,' she exclaimed. 'We wouldn't have been happy together!'

'We *would*.'

He pulled her into his arms and she stiffened automatically. Fortunately he did not say anything. As long as he kept quiet, she would be able to resist him. But if he spoke she would lose her head.

'No, Roger, no!' she begged, '— let me go!'

'Laura,' he murmured, brushing her cheek with his lips, 'Laura, dearest! . . .'

His voice was just audible above the rustle of the wind in the trees, but that made it even worse because it brought back so many nights when she had lain in his arms. That was the way he used to speak when he wanted her.

'Roger,' she said brokenly, 'please don't!'

'Yes . . .' he went on stubbornly. 'I love you, and you know I do . . . Please let me talk, Laura! . . . I think I'm more in love with you than I ever was . . . You're so beautiful, now!'

'You mustn't say these things,' she said faintly, bracing her hands against him with a wild look. These were the things he must not say or she would be lost. Whether they were true or not, they were unbearably sweet.

'Yes,' he smiled, holding her so that she could not escape, 'you're much better looking . . . You used to be awfully pretty, but you were never beautiful . . . Darling, I love you so!'

She felt his lips on her cheek and closed her eyes. 'Now I'm going,' she thought, 'this is the end.' She was afraid of what Jasmin would think, and she knew her mother would protest violently and say she was a fool to marry him again; but after that everything went out of her head, because nothing about him had changed. The touch of his lips and the way his arms went around her affected her as they had always done. This was part of her, and no man had ever been part of her except Roger.

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## *Chapter XXII*

TATINE drew up the blinds and sunlight flooded the bedroom. She looked down at Margot, who was lying drowsily among the pillows, and after a while she spoke.

'He's back,' she said.

'Yes, I know he's back,' replied Margot. 'I've known it for two days.'

Tatine moved heavily across the room, picking up stray pieces of underwear which Margot had dropped when she undressed the night before.

'You will see him now,' she said with conviction.

'Perhaps I don't want to see him,' replied Margot with a yawn. 'After all, he didn't treat me very well.'

She rose from the bed and ran her fingers through her hair, stifled another yawn, and sauntered toward the window. There was no wind at all on the lake, and the opposite shore was mirrored in the glassy water. Chub were rising at the end of the wharf, and the circles they made widened and disappeared as they fed on spent gnats and black flies. A chipmunk ran along the porch railing and scolded angrily, flicking his tail with repeated bursts of indignation, and from Dirigo Point came the whine of a sawmill. Margot turned away from the lake with a sigh, loathing it.

'I am going to the village this morning,' she announced.

Tatine protested that she had *brioches* to make and other things to do. It would be impossible for her to go before afternoon.

'I wasn't planning to take you with me,' replied Margot.

Tatine was annoyed because her trips to the village were the only things which relieved the unbearable monotony of her present existence. She said grumpily that she would like to go if Margot would wait for her.

'I have an appointment this morning with the hairdresser,' lied Margot.

She began to dress, with even more than her usual attention to detail. She put mascara on her lashes and eyebrows for the first time in days and rouged her cheeks. Tatine watched her with dawning suspicion, and a lewd smile appeared in the old woman's eyes. She paused in her housework, for it was always fascinating to watch her employer repairing the ravages that sleep and time had made in her face. As Margot deftly applied her *maquillage* the years dropped away, leaving her almost young. Her body, however, was much younger than her face. The small round bosoms under her negligee were as round and firm as they had ever been.

'You know,' said Tatine as Margot applied a rabbit's foot to her neck, 'you are more like a French woman than an American. Your attitude toward your body is correct. It is simply a means to an end, and should be treated with care and respect or it will bring you no happiness. If you tell an American woman that a body is simply a body, they are shocked. That is why so many of them are unhappy,' she said with finality.

'Yes, you're right,' murmured Margot, intent upon the lines in her neck.

'American women are children,' continued Tatine, 'when it comes to love. They seldom treat it with gaiety, which bores their lovers. But you, *chérie*, are different. You are the French type—'

'It's a game,' replied Margot. 'There are women who think it is a fairy-tale romance, and some think it is an everyday affair like cooking or washing diapers, but it is as complicated as *plafond*, and if you want to win, you must play it with finesse.'

— I lost heavily in the past,’ she added as she rose, ‘but I know more now. That’s why, my dear Tatine, I have not been down to the end of the lake.’

‘But you’re going this morning,’ Tatine pointed out.

‘I have to go,’ said Margot evenly. ‘My hair hasn’t been shampooed in two weeks.’

She avoided Tatine’s eyes and the old woman suppressed a cackle.

Margot was not in the mood this morning to confide in Tatine. There were many times when she wanted to quash the old woman, and this was one of them, but Tatine had to be handled with tact because she knew too much. Margot walked quickly out of the room before Tatine could offer any advice on the subject of Roger, found Jim Woodruff, and started down the lake. Jim looked at her spruce figure with doubting eyes. In her green linen dress and white straw hat, she was what he called a ‘bit too fancy’ for Winnebago. Margot was conscious of his stare and was annoyed. There was no reason why, if she wanted to, she should not look smart in the middle of the Maine woods. Again she felt that chill creeping over her — that feeling of being a stranger, of not belonging, which had always hounded her in the past. Perhaps it was her own fault; if she had conformed they might have accepted her, but she would not conform for any of them. Roger was the only one who ever understood how she felt about the woods, and how much she hated them.

‘Are you goin’ to the village?’ asked Jim.

‘I don’t know,’ she replied briefly.

God! but servants were a nuisance . . . The outboard purred along the green shore and Margot looked absently at the sky. Large, woolly clouds were spaced at intervals on the wide blue bowl overhead, and a flight of swallows dipped and eddied above the water, but she looked at them with unseeing eyes. She was thinking many things, but her face was untroubled. She was confident in her own ability to get what she wanted.

When she arrived at the Outlet, instead of taking the car out of the garage she walked up the hill to Willie Tinker's, leaving Jim cooling his heels on the wharf. She opened the door of the main camp and looked in. Anola Frisbee was running a mop along the edges of the floor, but when she saw her she paused.

'Good morning, Anola,' said Margot, 'can you tell me where Mr. Hawthorne is?'

'The end camp near the ice-house,' said Anola, who was a woman of few words. She went back to her work and Margot closed the door.

She patted her hair nervously as she walked down the narrow path between the camps, but that was the only gesture of emotion she made.

She rapped her knuckles softly on the door, and Roger said 'Come in!' With a faint smile she entered the camp, closing the door behind her. Roger looked up and stared at her blankly. He was tying flies, and the small table in front of him was strewn with feathers and chenille and tinsel.

'Well,' she said lightly, 'aren't you going to speak?'

He rose, and some of the feathers sailed into the air.

'Hello, Margot,' he exclaimed, 'how are you?'

'I was on my way to the village,' she explained, 'so I thought I'd see if you were here . . . I want to talk to you about something.'

'Sit down,' he replied. 'I'll take some of the things off that chair.'

He swept a bundle of dirty clothes into his arms and deposited them in the bedroom while Margot sat down with a smile. He was nervous, which gave her the advantage.

'I heard you were here,' he said.

'Why didn't you come and see me?'

'I meant to,' he replied, 'but I haven't had time. Jasmin and I went down to Vinal Haven, and since I got back I've been busy.'

Margot could read any meaning she chose into that statement, but she knew from experience that the affair was over — done for. She was simply a casual acquaintance he had planned to see if he had time. Her gorge rose, for after all he had left a wife and child for her; he had loved her recklessly for many months. But she checked the words that rose to her lips.

'Weren't you a little unfeeling?' she murmured reproachfully, with a smile.

Roger replied that he was no good, and she had known that twenty years ago.

'However,' she smiled, 'I forgive you. This is a terribly awkward place to see each other.'

'Yes, it is,' agreed Roger, 'and you were very silly to come here, unless you want the whole lake to know it.'

Margot changed the subject. 'I was surprised when I heard *you'd* gone to Vinal Haven. I thought Laura or Mrs. Emery would take Jasmin away. I didn't know they'd make you . . . I suppose Laura wouldn't leave Sandy,' she added.

Roger ignored the implications in that remark, and said, not very truthfully, that no one had made him, that he had gone of his own accord. He asked her if she had heard from Tony.

'Yes.'

'Is there any chance of his coming up here again?'

'I don't think so.'

'The whole thing is very disturbing,' exclaimed Roger with a frown. 'As far as I can see, you two women have made a mess of it. Why didn't you tell Tony about all this business years ago?'

'Tell him *what?*' parried Margot. Roger looked uncomfortable, and she added, 'You know perfectly well I couldn't tell him any of it. He was too young to understand, for one thing, and for another—'

'Does he know yet?'

'I believe he knows some of it. Tatine told him.'

'How much does Tatine know?'

'Everything,' said Margot.

Roger did not like the idea of a servant knowing what had gone on between himself and Margot. 'Did you tell her?' he demanded.

'No,' lied Margot, 'she found out most of it herself.'

'I don't see how she could have,' he retorted, 'unless you were indiscreet.'

Margot flushed, but held her tongue. Roger turned on his heel and wandered toward the window, and she gazed at him intently. He was still very handsome, and a sharp pang of anger and frustration swept over her. He was hers—she had owned him as Laura had never owned him—and she was determined to get him back.

'It's a pity they had to fall in love,' he said at last. 'I don't like the idea of my child being hurt.'

'Yes, it was a pity,' she murmured. She asked him if he had a cigarette, and he handed her his case.

'Margot . . .'

'Yes, Roger?'

'Why did you come up here?'

'Because I'm broke,' she answered frankly. 'I can't get any money out of France at all.'

'It must have taken courage to come back to the woods.'

'Nerve, you mean,' she said with a short laugh. '— But I don't care what they think—or what they say—they can't drive me out of here again.'

She put her hand on his arm, and he let it stay there. 'Roger, do you remember the day we went up the river?'

'Yes, of course.'

'That was the first time we ever sneaked away. You were a little upset—remember?—but you got over it. We had fun, always . . .'

'Yes,' he admitted uneasily.

'You're frightened this morning,' she murmured. 'You haven't changed a bit, have you? You're just the same, silly boy!'

'I've changed in some ways,' he replied.

'We had such fun, and so many good laughs,' she murmured, '— we were so terribly happy for a while!'

'Yes, we were,' he admitted.

'And then something happened—I don't know what.'

Roger's eyes were disturbed as he put his hand over hers. 'I'm sorry, Margot,' he replied. 'I was a heel, I know, to go away and leave you like that.'

'I couldn't understand what I'd done to make you leave me so casually—'

'You didn't do anything, Margot. It was unforgivable of me.'

The remorse in his voice was so genuine that her spirits rose, but a moment later he dropped her hand and turned back to the window.

'The wind is rising,' he said in a normal tone. 'I think I'll go fishing now. I have an hour or so before lunch. What are you planning to do—go to the village?'

'Yes,' she replied evenly. 'I have an appointment with the hairdresser. You'll be here when I get back?'

'Perhaps . . . But I think we'd better be careful, Margot.'

'Naturally,' she smiled.

She pressed his hand and then went out into the summer morning and walked along the shore of the lake. She was satisfied, for she had accomplished what she wanted, but at the same time she was restless and uncomfortable, for he was eluding her.

That was the way he used to be—as shy as a colt when she first knew him—but as the days went on he had been easily managed. She would have him again if she used her head; and as she walked toward the waiting boat, she knew she must have him, not only for the sake of her pride, but as a cure for her loneliness. She was young, still, and she needed him.

Jim was waiting for her in the outboard. She told him to get out and bring the car down to the wharf, and while he was gone she got into the boat and found a wrench. It was a simple thing to do—one brisk tap and the spark plug flew into a thousand bits. She was trusting that Jim did not have a spare plug with him.

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## *Chapter XXIII*

THE SUNLIGHT crept into the room, touching up the silver on the bureau and a photograph of Jasmin in her coming-out dress. Laura turned restlessly on her side and watched the light pause for an instant on a bowl of forget-me-nots on the table between the windows and then glow warmly on the pine ceiling overhead. She had had very little sleep and every nerve in her body was awake.

She flung her arm across her eyes as the sunlight touched the bed and tried to relax, but she could still feel Roger's mouth on hers. Her mind had been in a turmoil ever since they left the clearing. Roger was the cause of all the unhappiness she had ever had — what made her think he would be able to make her happy now?

'Men don't change,' she reminded herself, but intuition told her that women don't change either.

She knew what being in love with Roger meant — ecstasy sometimes punctuated with exasperation. But she felt she understood him now, in a way she had never understood him before. Instead of growing apart in the last twenty years, they had in some odd way grown together, and she felt they would stay married this time.

With this comforting thought she got out of bed. She moved toward the bureau and the morning sunlight fell on her hair. In the past few weeks it had grown a shade grayer, but Roger liked it.

Never mind about Roger. She must think of something else for a few minutes or she would lose what little objectivity she had about this love affair. She ran a comb through her hair, decided that fluffiness wasn't becoming to her, and smoothed it down again. As she dressed, she thought about the weekly market order in an effort to keep her thoughts away from what had happened in the clearing. She put on a brown tweed skirt which she had been saving for an occasion and a Shetland pullover. Then she applied some lipstick, rubbed off most of it, and went downstairs.

Sandy was standing by the window. As he turned, a feeling of helplessness swept over her. She loved him deeply, and she knew she was going to hurt him. 'Sandy,' she exclaimed in what she hoped was a natural voice, 'why did you get up so early?'

'Is it very early?' he said. 'Something woke me, and I couldn't go back to sleep. I thought I'd go fishing before breakfast, but the damn lake's too still.'

— Words they might have spoken to each other any morning. Just words. She took his hand, and he kissed her fingers gently — something he had done a hundred times, but this morning it was unbearable. She wanted to put her arms around him and say, 'Darling, I don't want to hurt you — ever! I like you too much. I don't want you to hate me or feel bitter toward me, and I'm afraid you will — it would be surprising if you didn't,' but instead, she smiled at him as she would have any other day and said, 'You can always fish up the river.'

'Before breakfast?' he demurred. 'It's such a long way, and I'm hungry.'

'Let's have some breakfast.' She moved toward the kitchen, thinking, 'I am a bitch — I've let him stay in love with me for years — in some ways I'm worse than Margot ever was — but I needed him so!'

A still, small voice echoed that Sandy needed her too. 'I'll tell him this evening,' she thought, 'I'll let him have one more day on

the river . . . If I tell him now he may feel so upset that he'll go away . . . Oh, Sandy! why did this have to happen? It isn't fair . . .'

He wandered after her into the kitchen and sat down at the table. Loretta had picked some trilliums the day before and he fingered them idly. 'Laura,' he said after a while, 'do you think Jasmin has any idea of going to Boston?'

'Perhaps,' she replied. 'I wouldn't be surprised. From what I can gather, Roger had as hard a time with her as I did.'

'Are you still determined not to let her marry that boy?'

'Yes.'

'How are you going to stop her, Laura?'

'I don't know, but I will.'

Her lips were set in a firm line and her eyes were hard. 'Oh, Laura,' he thought, 'be soft! Hate is such a destructive thing. If you destroy that love-affair, you may end by destroying yourself.'

Aloud he said, 'I advise you to let Roger handle it. If you break up this thing, people will talk. They'll say you did it out of spite—they'll say you're only thinking of yourself.'

'I don't give a damn what people say,' replied Laura. 'I know what I'm doing.'

He watched her while she moved around the kitchen, and after a while he said, 'You're extraordinarily pretty this morning—what have you done to yourself?'

'Nothing,' said Laura. 'Just the same old lipstick and hair-brushing. The skirt's new, that's all.'

'I wasn't referring to your clothes or your make-up. You look . . . radiant. That's a cliché, I suppose, but that's the way you look.'

'Do I?' said Laura uneasily.

It was just possible that he suspected something had happened yesterday, and this was his way of leading up to the subject of herself and Roger. She set the coffee and toast in front of him and he smiled at her. 'You look much happier,' he said.

'I'm not happy,' she replied. 'I'm worried. — Sandy, what do you know? *Is Jasmin going to Boston?*'

'I have no idea. That was simply intuition on my part.'

'Then she hasn't confided in you?'

'No, she hasn't.'

Laura sat down opposite him and spread guava jelly on a piece of toast. 'I'll get Jasmin alone tonight,' she thought, 'and tell her that I'm going to marry Roger again. I won't say anything — I'll just let her figure out for herself how awkward it will be for her if she marries Tony. The world will say I'm selfish — even Sandy will say that — but I'll have to take it. I'll try that first, and then —'

She was interrupted by a low whine. 'Roddy's scratching at the door,' she said aloud. 'Go let him in, will you?'

Sandy rose and opened the door, and let in the morning. The sunlight spilled over the worn boards of the kitchen floor, and the air in the room was sweetened with the fragrance of pine and hemlock and wood-smoke. Birds were singing everywhere, and above a counterpoint of wrens and chickadees rose the voice of a lone song-sparrow. He was singing right in the middle of the note, unlike other sparrows who sometimes flatted badly, and Laura listened to him in silent appreciation.

'Summer's here, all right,' said Sandy. 'Will you go up the river with me this morning, Laura?'

'No,' she replied. 'I have to go to the village to do the weekly marketing. We have almost nothing in the house.'

She was going to the village, and then she was going to see Roger. If she saw him first, the chances were she'd never get to the village, for Roger never went there if he could help it. She added lamely, 'I have a lot of errands.'

'Very well,' said Sandy, not hiding the disappointment in his voice, 'I'll go fishing alone.'

He went out into the sunlight, and the kitchen door closed after him. Laura drank the rest of her coffee with an oppressive

feeling of loss. The sound of the door closing was the end of an era.

Bert followed her down to the wharf. 'Are you goin' to the village now, Laura?'

'Yes,' she replied grimly. After a series of delays, most of which could have been avoided, she was finally in the boat. She had started for the wharf three times, and each time somebody had called her back. Bert was the final interruption, and she was afraid he wanted to go with her.

But he didn't, for which she was grateful. 'I need a new blade for the saw,' he said, hunting through his pocket for a slip of paper on which he had written the dimensions. 'And you'd better go round to the freight office and see if them clay pigeons are there. You sent for 'em quite a while ago.'

'Yes, I did,' replied Laura, stifling her impatience.

'— And Loretta says she forgot to put buckwheat flour on the list.'

Laura picked up the rope for the self-starter. 'Is that all?'

'I guess so. When you comin' home? I thought we might transplant them bushes in front of the camp this afternoon. I don't know where you want me to put 'em. And what are you goin' to do about the bats in the ice-house?'

It occurred to her with a sudden feeling of relief that in the future Roger would have to attend to the annoying details of camp life—it was going to be comforting to have a man again, to be able to lean on someone instead of having everybody lean on her.

'I don't know what to do about the bats,' she said. 'I'll talk to you about that later.'

She gave the rope a jerk and started off before he could bother her with any more problems. The lake was glassy and still, and here and there on its becalmed surface clusters of rings widened and died where fish were rising for spent may-flies or passing

gnats. The water was sprinkled with soft yellow pollen from the overhanging trees, and from time to time a catkin floated by, dropped from some leafing alder. As the boat moved down the shore its wake surged over the round gray stones and the tangled roots, leaving them dark and wet . . . Laura noticed these things in passing with a feeling of delight. She couldn't remember when she had seen a lovelier morning, but it may have been because she was happy.

When she arrived in the village, she encountered more delays. The First National was full of customers, and the list Loretta had given her was unusually long. By the time she reached the freight office, it was after twelve, and she was horrified to find a sign on the door reading, 'Out for lunch.' She was upset for several reasons. She had planned to lunch with Roger—although he didn't know it—but she wanted the clay pigeons. She hovered around the freight office for twenty minutes, and then gave up waiting for Aldo Pennock, the freight agent. If Roger wanted to shoot that afternoon, they could come back after lunch.

The road to Winnebago seemed endless. Fifteen miles stretched into thirty, and she couldn't make time because of the ruts. She remembered going to meet Roger once, years ago, with the same desperate sensation of losing time she could have spent with him, because of things beyond her control. She remembered hurrying along the road—only that time she was on foot, and the road was a path in Vinal Haven along the edge of the sea. The waves were crashing far below among the yellow rocks, and she could hear them now, more than twenty-five years later. She had hurried madly, in her haste, stumbling over juniper bushes and wild sweet vines, and at the end of the path she had found him waiting for her patiently, sitting on a rock and watching the antics of some dolphins a hundred yards off shore. He had held out his arms and she had crept into them and put her head down on his shoulder with a gasp because she had run

so hard, and Roger had said, ‘Foolish girl! Did you think I wouldn’t wait?’

This time, however, he didn’t know she was coming. He might not be there at all.

She put her foot on the accelerator, and the bottles and cans in the back of the car began to rattle at an alarming rate until she slowed down again. She wondered what had possessed her not to tell him she was lunching with him, and she was disgusted with the coyness which had made her think it would be a good idea to drop in on him unexpectedly. She had to see him — she had so many things to talk over with him — so many things which she had failed to say yesterday.

Anola Frisbee was wringing out a mop beside the kitchen door. Laura called to her: ‘Anola, is Mr. Hawthorne here, or has he gone fishing?’

‘He went fishin’,’ replied Anola, ‘but he come back. He’s havin’ lunch.’

‘Oh, is he?’ said Laura, manfully hiding her relief. ‘Then I’ll go in.’

Anola busied herself with the mop while Laura got out of the car. Laura walked past her around the corner of the house and opened the front door. Willie Tinker was standing behind the small counter where he kept cigarettes and fishing tackle and fly-dope. He looked up as she entered with an uneasy smile.

Laura realized he was surprised, but she couldn’t worry about that now — it was her business whether she lunched with her former husband or not.

‘Is Roger in the dining-room?’ she asked.

‘Yes, Laura,’ replied Willie.

As she moved toward the door, she had a strange feeling that Roger would be waiting for her — expecting her — the way he had waited for her that day in Vinal Haven years ago — that he knew she was coming. She turned the handle of the door with a faint smile and looked in.

She stood there for an instant on the threshold and then quietly closed the door again. She didn't know whether Roger had seen her or not. She knew Willie was watching her from the other side of the room, his eyes kind but all-knowing. It was the most humiliating moment of her life, and she was sorry that Willie had to share it with her, but she knew he would hold his tongue.

She turned away from the door and their eyes met. 'Have a cigarette, Laura,' Willie said, offering her one across the little counter.

'No, thank you,' she heard herself saying. 'Will you help me take my things down to the boat? Some of them are quite heavy.'

Life went on . . . You had a big market order in the car, and like any other day you asked Willie to help you carry it down to the wharf . . . Life went on, as it must. For twenty-four hours you'd thought you were going to be happy again — and you had let your hope and your imagination run away with you. Roger was no more capable of making her happy than he had ever been. The day after he had held her in his arms and told her he loved her, he had had lunch with Margot. She had forgotten how really inhuman he could be until she saw him laughing at Margot across the table. She could see that the hours they had spent in the clearing meant nothing to him. Not even the fact that their second marriage had been consummated had kept him from having fun when the opportunity came along. He was the same man she had divorced, he would never change.

With a feeling of loss that was irrevocable, she turned and followed Willie out into the summer afternoon.

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## *Chapter XXIV*

SANDY ate the rest of his apple pie. 'I don't think Laura'll be home now,' he said. He had been very quiet all through lunch.

Jasmin said to him, 'Are you still worrying about mother? She probably had lunch in the village.'

'I'm not worried about her,' he replied, 'but I was afraid the motor had broken down again.'

'We need a new outboard,' said Mrs. Emery, 'but we're not going to have one. The sawmill was terribly expensive. We'll have to wait until next year.'

'Better not wait,' said Sandy. 'They may freeze outboard motors if we go to war.'

'Yes, I suppose they will,' agreed Mrs. Emery.

She rose and led the way into the living-room. Sandy opened the front door and observed that it was a good afternoon to fish the pools on the river, but in reality he was still listening for the outboard. He fingered the coins in his pocket and gazed at the tracery of leaves overhead, his forehead creased with thought. 'Perhaps,' he mused, 'she had lunch at Tinker's.'

Mrs. Emery and Jasmin were arguing the pros and cons of a new motor when he heard Laura coming up the lake. With a feeling of relief he left the house and went down to the wharf. The outboard was loaded to the gunwales with the weekly market order, and Laura was sitting upright in the stern with her hair blowing in the wind. He did not know it, but her spine was stiff with anger.

'Hello, Sandy,' she said as she turned off the motor. 'I thought you were going fishing.'

'I waited for you,' he replied, 'in the hope that you'd go with me. Will you, Laura?'

'Yes, Sandy,' she answered. He helped her out of the boat and tied it to a cleat.

'Let's go now,' she said unexpectedly. 'You can get my rod for me, can't you? I'll wait for you down here.'

'But you must be hungry!' he demurred.

'No,' she lied. 'I had something to eat in the village.'

She wanted to get away from the house—from the lake—she wanted the quiet upper reaches of the river. They were an anodyne for trouble. The peace up there was so unearthly that pain and heartache had no connection with it. She needed the beauty of those grassy banks and limpid brown pools. They were the only sanctuary she had ever known.

Sandy came back to the wharf, and they embarked in a row-boat. The afternoon wind was brisk and cooling, and she tilted her face so that it flowed over her hot cheeks. Sandy did not say much; he seemed to be occupied with a hatch of infinitesimal flies on the water. They entered the mouth of the stream and a curtain of silence fell around them.

'Are you all right?' murmured Sandy after a long pause.

'Yes, I'm all right. What made you think I wasn't?'

'You're so quiet.'

'I'm tired, that's all,' she said. 'I had so many errands to do and the village was full of people. I wanted to get away from the house. I'm so tired of problems.'

'Go to sleep, Laura. That's what you need.'

'No, Sandy, I'd rather look at the sky and the elm trees—they're more soothing than sleep. Why didn't I come up here this morning instead of going to the village? Jasmin could have done the marketing . . . Jasmin is old enough to do my job.'

Physical and mental lassitude spread through her body until

she had neither the strength nor the desire to fish. Sandy anchored the boat and cast a dry-fly into the center of a deep pool under some alders. The current carried it safely past the over-hanging bushes and the peeled logs where the beavers had been at work. He cast again, and the line sang softly in the quiet afternoon. She wondered why she had ever wanted anything more, why anything else had seemed as satisfying or desirable. The big moments in life came as quietly and simply as this, like morning coming unobtrusively into a darkened room. This moment was the answer to everything . . . even Tony. She would tell Sandy the truth, and he would think of some way out. Tony . . . Why had she thought she could marry Roger again, with the shadow of that boy always between them? Here in the quiet woods, it seemed not only impossible but indecent.

'There are no fish in this pool,' announced Sandy. 'What'll we do now?'

'Let's stay here,' she answered; 'let's stay here and talk to each other. The fishing will be better toward evening, anyway.'

'What do you want to talk about?' asked Sandy as he reeled in his line.

'Us,' replied Laura briefly.

If he was surprised, he did not show it. He laid the rod carefully in the bottom of the boat and lit his pipe with an impassive face.

'That's one reason why I wanted to come up here,' she continued. 'I wanted to see you alone.'

'Did you?' he replied.

'Yes . . . I don't know whether you want to hear me or not.'

'I always want to "hear you,"' he smiled. 'What is it, Laura? What do you want to say about us?'

'Quite a lot, and I don't know how to begin . . . You've waited so long, Sandy. Perhaps you've waited too long. How do I know you won't think this is an anticlimax?'

'I wish I knew what you're driving at,' he said. 'I'm a little confused.'

'Oh, Sandy! — you know what I want to say. Can't you help me put it into words? — I don't know how to say that you were right and I was wrong.'

'What about? — Jasmin and Tony?'

'No, Sandy. I'm talking about *us*, now.'

Sandy took a match out of his pocket and relit his pipe which had gone out. From an elm tree on the other side of the river came the song of a veery, and the water lapped quietly among the reeds.

'Help me,' she said. 'Oh, Sandy, I need you! I thought that you needed me, but I see now that it's the other way 'round. I'm so tired, Sandy — I want you to take care of me.'

'I'd like to take care of you,' he said quietly.

His eyes were on the opposite bank, and she wished that he would look her way instead. She needed help before she could speak. 'Sandy!' she murmured, 'look at me! . . .'

He turned and their eyes met, and then he glanced away. 'Well, go on,' he said.

'Don't you know what I'm going to say? I know I can't live without you, Sandy — you're the only real person I've ever known. You've never hurt me, and you've always been there when I needed you. That's so important — so necessary —'

Sandy cleared his throat. 'Wait a minute, Laura. There's just one thing. We've never slept together.'

'That doesn't matter. In fact, I think it's a good thing. At least I know this isn't physical.'

'No . . . But how do I know I can satisfy you?'

'You have in every other way. — Oh, Sandy!'

The anchor was dragging with the current, and he let out a few feet of rope so that the boat would ride more easily. She looked at him hungrily, knowing that his solid frame represented

everything she wanted in life. She had been a fool, but she was ready to admit it.

'You know how long I've waited to hear you say these things, Laura.'

'Yes. Much too long. But I had to be sure.'

'— And you're quite sure now?'

'Absolutely. I haven't a doubt in my mind any more.'

She expected him to say, 'I'm glad, Laura,' but he tapped his pipe on the gunwale and put it back in his pocket in silence. The veery had stopped singing and she could hear her heart beating over the murmur of the river. She waited for him to speak, a little perplexed because his face was so withdrawn.

'I was a fool,' she said, 'a fool to have waited all this time.'

'No, Laura,' he replied, 'you were extremely sensible. And as it turns out, I was right not to force you. It would have been disastrous if we'd married sooner.'

'Don't let's waste any time, now,' she said. 'We've waited long enough.'

He rubbed his hands together without replying, and she was startled because she might have been talking about any subject except the one which, presumably, meant the most to him. His expression remained unchanged. She waited helplessly.

'Laura,' he said at last, 'we can't get married. You know that as well as I do.'

When she saw that he was serious, her face grew pale. There was a dreadful, cold feeling in her spine. 'I was afraid of that,' she answered quietly. 'I've waited too long. You're not in love any more, and I don't blame you.'

'I *am* in love with you,' he replied, 'more, perhaps, than I've ever been. But that's beside the point. — I'm not quite sure why you decided this afternoon that you wanted to marry me, but I think I can guess. Something happened to you this morning.'

She was about to deny it, but realized that denial was useless.

'From the beginning,' he went on, 'I knew something would hurt you. It was inevitable. But you can't stop now.'

'What do you mean?'

'I'm not the answer to it, Laura,' he replied heavily. 'You're in love with Roger, and you always have been, and that's why you've never married me. Roger is the only man you could ever love. For a while I was stupid enough to think it didn't matter — that we could be happy just the same — but I see now that it's impossible. You wouldn't be happy with anyone else.'

'Roger doesn't want me,' she heard herself saying, although she tried to hold the words back. 'And I don't want him. He makes me too unhappy. He's not like you — he's cruel, and he's weak, and he's dishonest.'

'Yes, Laura, but you love him.'

'No, I don't.'

'You can't say that with much conviction. I think I know what happened this morning, and it was Margot again. — Are you going to let her get away with it a second time?'

A dull flush crept over her face as she remembered how she had burst into that dining-room, expecting to find Roger waiting for her. The way he had been smiling at Margot — talking to her with the old intimacy — was sickening.

Sandy drew his hand across his forehead with a sigh. 'The trouble is, Margot is as cheap as hell, and you don't know how to fight her with her own weapons.'

'I don't want to fight her,' retorted Laura scornfully. 'She can have him if she wants him. This time I'm through forever.'

Sandy shook his head. 'No, Laura, don't say that. You'll never be finished with Roger.'

'I'll never marry him!'

'You could if you wanted to, and you'd be rather foolish if you didn't. You won't be happy otherwise.'

'I could be happy with you,' she returned vehemently, 'but you don't want me.' Her eyes glittered as she realized how she had

lost him, and she exclaimed, ‘It’s Roger’s fault! — everything that ever happens to me is always his fault! I needed you, and now because of him I’ve lost you. This is just one more thing he’s done to me and I hate him with every fiber of my being. I was a fool — I should have married you years ago!’

‘You wouldn’t have married me,’ said Sandy. ‘Something would have stopped you at the last minute. Either your heart or your common sense would have done the trick.’

‘No,’ she said, ‘that’s not true. I still want to marry you tomorrow. I love you, Sandy.’

‘I know,’ he said, slowly pulling in the anchor rope, ‘but the word “love” has a great many meanings.’

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## *Chapter XXV*

**I**T HAS SEEMED so long, my darling, but it's really only a week since you left. Please write me as often as you can, because I miss you so.'

Jasmin paused and read the last two lines over again. This display of emotion on paper made her nervous; she was not used to writing love-letters. She wanted to tell Tony how much she missed him, and how lonely the lake and the river seemed without him, and how incredibly dull the summer was, but she found it was difficult to put her emotions into words.

'I went past our picnic place the other day,' she continued, 'and it looked very lonely. We had such fun, didn't we? But we'll have another picnic when you come up here on leave. I'm going to the village this afternoon because it's too hot and still to fish. As a matter of fact, the fishing isn't very good. You're not missing anything. Mother and Sandy went up the river yesterday afternoon and didn't catch a thing. Grandma seems to be the only person who's getting anything, but then, she can raise a fish when nobody else can. She caught a salmon yesterday in a dead calm, and Sandy accused her of jigging it, but she says she caught it on a dry-fly.'

Jasmin paused again. This wasn't indicating in any way how she felt. She knew he wanted her to show some emotion in her letters, because his own were very ardent and he complained that she was too matter-of-fact. 'I'll tell him what I did last night,' she decided.

I sang for a while after dinner, and then I thought I'd go out in the canoe. The lake was very still, and there was a full moon which made a path all the way down to the Outlet. It was so lovely that I paddled for hours, and then I got lonely for you and landed at our little point. I sat there for a long time, because I could almost feel your arms around me and hear your voice.

'Take care of yourself, and let me know how you're getting on. I'm glad you like your commanding officer. I know that makes things easier. I think of you every moment I'm awake, and love you more each day. *À bientôt, Jasmin.*'

Not a very good letter, but perhaps Tony would be able to read between the lines. She sealed and stamped it, and then went to find Sandy. He was mending a net in the toolhouse, and she sat down and watched him for a moment while he fixed it with a piece of twine.

'Did you want something in the village, Sandy?' she said finally.

'Yes,' he replied, looking up. 'I want you to see if you can get me a berth on the State of Maine Express tomorrow night. If you can't, I'll take a train to Boston.'

It depressed her to think he was leaving, because there were times when she felt he was the only person in the camp who was really in sympathy with her. He'd found her crying a few days ago, and instead of telling her not to be foolish, had mixed her a drink. As for her father, he was in an impossible mood, and he was so preoccupied and worried about something that he was a melancholy companion.

'Do you have to go, Sandy?' she asked hesitantly.

'Yes.'

'Do you want a whole section or just a lower?'

'Oh, I guess I'll take a section. I'll sleep better if I do.'

He was standing by the workbench, fumbling with the broken net, and there were shadows under his eyes. She knew he hadn't slept very well the night before because she had heard him mov-

ing in the next room, and once he had gone downstairs. She had a troubled feeling that she knew what had happened, and her heart went out to him silently, with a dull ache. She loved him — you couldn't help loving Sandy — and she didn't want him to be hurt. She made a gesture toward him, but he didn't see it and she was afraid to speak. After a moment she opened the door and went out into the quiet summer afternoon.

Her mother knew best, she supposed, but Sandy would have been the answer to so many things. He was so loving-kind, so patient, and so dear. Her mother had been lonely, always, and she needed him. Jasmin didn't know what had made her send him away, but she was sure her mother had told Sandy she wasn't going to marry him. Nothing else could have made him so quiet and so forlorn. She almost went back to the toolhouse, but then she remembered how wide a gap there was between the two generations. She wasn't supposed to know that he was in trouble, or be old enough to guess the reason why. With a wry smile she went on her way.

The village was drowsing in the summer afternoon. From the blacksmith shop beyond the stream came the clink of the anvil and the stamp of heavy hooves, and the water made a cool, rushing sound as it spilled over the dam. A horse and buggy went by, clop-clopping in the white Maine dust, and then a herd of brindled cows driven by a small boy, and then a pair of hikers. Jasmin looked into the stream and saw some fish idly nosing the current; there were half a dozen suckers, a few minnows, and three fair-sized trout. Fishing was forbidden in the stream after the close of the smelt season, but she amused herself by throwing live grasshoppers into the stream and watching the trout rise for them. Verne Beecher came along the road in the mail truck and paused.

'Jasmin,' he called, 'there's a registered parcel for you down at the Outlet — did Willie give it to you?'

'Willie wasn't there. Where was it from, Verne?' she asked trying to remember whether she had ordered anything.

'As I remember, it was from Boston.'

Boston. The parcel was undoubtedly from Tony. At this unexpected pleasure her mood lightened considerably. She said to Verne, 'Thank you for telling me—I'll pick it up on the way home.'

The drowsing afternoon suddenly sprang to life. She wondered what Tony had sent her and what had prompted him to do it. As she drove back to the Outlet along the narrow road, a glow of happiness pervaded her, and the things which had been worrying her faded. Even the family scandal lost its nightmare quality. 'Oh, Tony!' she thought, 'how very dear you are! You're like Sandy—kind and thoughtful and generous—you're just like a rock in a weary land. Nothing changes you—you're always calm and sane. Why do I worry so when there's nothing to worry about? We're going to be all right—no one can spoil our happiness, because you won't let them . . .'

She turned the last bend in the road and saw the lake stretching toward South Mountain like a sheet of pale blue glass. A bank of white clouds was massed behind the mountain, and the new leaves on the trees hung motionless in the first heat of summer. The slumbering lake made her pause for a moment before she went indoors; it was so tranquil that it reflected, not only the clouds and the sky, but her own brooding happiness.

She smiled to herself as she opened the door of Willie's main camp. The hall was dark after the brilliant sunlight outside, and it was a moment or two before she noticed Tatine, who was waiting for something, or someone, with an expression of grim patience on her face.

Jasmin spoke to her, and Tatine looked at her curiously without saying anything in reply. Jasmin was angry, for it was a direct snub, but she controlled her anger for Tony's sake and crossed the hall in silence toward Willie's office.

She knocked and Willie opened the door. 'Hello, Jasmin!' he exclaimed. 'I've got a registered parcel for you from Boston.'

'Yes, I know,' she replied. 'I met Verne in the village, and he told me to come for it.'

Over her shoulder, Willie caught sight of Tatine. 'Oh!' he said, 'are you still here?'

'Yes,' replied Tatine crossly, 'that man is not back yet. I do not know what has happened to him.'

She was referring to Jim Woodruff, who had gone off on some private business of his own and left her sitting there for almost an hour.

She added sharply, 'Madame is ill—I must go home to her. I have her medicine, and she is waiting for it. Jim knows that! Where is he?'

Willie had no idea where Jim was, and Tatine muttered something unprintable in French. Willie turned to Jasmin, 'I'll get your parcel for you—you'll have to sign for it.'

Jasmin hastily signed the receipt. Tatine watched her in silence, her sloe-black eyes smouldering with unspoken contempt. Jasmin broke the sealing wax at either end of the parcel and untied the cord with clumsy fingers; she knew what he had sent her.

'Oh, Tony!' she thought, 'why did you spend all that money? — it's so big! A little one would have done just as well.'

The baguette diamond glimmered in the dark hall. There was a letter too, and she opened it and moved toward the window. A smile wavered on her lips as the sunlight fell on his handwriting, and she forgot that Tatine was watching her. Willie was watching her too, with a pensive look.

'Dear Jasmin,' she read, 'I wish I could bring this to you instead of mailing it. I want you to put it on right away and announce the engagement. There's no sense in waiting any longer, and I think we ought to get married as soon as we can. I don't

know where I'm going to be sent after I leave here, but I want to take you with me if I can. Love, Tony.'

She took the ring out of the box again and slipped it on her finger. It was a trifle large, but her wedding ring would keep it in place. She looked up and saw Willie's expression. It was thoughtful and a little sad, as though he understood what was going through her mind. She moved toward him with a smile, ignoring Tatine. She had known him since she was born, and she could be honest with him. It was all right to let him see how much she cared — Tatine no longer mattered.

'Isn't it lovely?' she said, holding up her left hand. 'Did you ever see such a big stone?'

'No,' said Willie, 'I never did. It's awful handsome — must have cost him plenty!'

'Too much,' she agreed.

'When you gettin' married?'

'Soon, I hope. Have you seen Father this afternoon? I want to show it to him.'

'He was around awhile ago,' said Willie. 'I heard him say it was too still to go fishin', so he's probably down at the camp.'

Jasmin turned toward the door, and met Tatine's implacable eyes. The old Frenchwoman's silence infuriated her. She might have said something — one word of congratulation! — but her black figure was as motionless as stone.

'Good luck, Jasmin!' added Willie. 'I wish you and Tony all kinds of happiness.'

She thanked him and went out. Halfway down the path she heard the door of the main camp open again; and someone ran down the steps and hurried after her. It was Tatine, and she wondered whether the old woman had had a pang of conscience and changed her mind. It was just possible she was sorry. Tatine caught up with her.

*'Un moment, mademoiselle!'*

Jasmin halted. The old woman's voice was bitter and her face had an ugly look on it. 'I wish to talk to you, mademoiselle. You must not show your father that ring. Do you understand? — you must not go another step.'

'I think that's my business, Tatine,' replied Jasmin. She started to walk on, but Tatine blocked the path.

Jasmin's eyes grew bright with anger. 'Let me go, will you? You can't stop me like this!'

'I can, and I will,' retorted the old woman with vehemence. 'Madame is ill, and it is all because of you — you and that cruel inhuman father of yours! Madame's heart is affected, and you are to blame.'

Jasmin remembered that Tatine was unbalanced where Margot was concerned, and discounted some of this, but she was worried nevertheless. If Margot was on the verge of a breakdown, she didn't want to precipitate it.

But neither did she want to be ordered around by Tatine. The old woman was planted firmly in the center of the path, and she tried to dodge her, but Tatine grabbed her and dug her fingers into her arm.

'No,' cried Tatine, 'you are not going a step farther! You are going to listen to me first. You don't know what you are doing!'

Jasmin tried to shake her off, but the old woman held her in an iron grip.

'Madame went to bed yesterday with a *crise de nerfs!*' exclaimed Tatine accusingly. 'She is taking digitalis — she is seriously ill — and if you show anyone that ring she will die! The shock will kill her!'

'I'm sorry she's ill,' replied Jasmin truthfully, 'but I don't believe it will be very much of a shock to her. She has known for a long while that Tony and I are going to be married.'

Tatine's fingers dug into her again. 'Listen, you little fool! Your father will tell you the same thing. He will order you to take off that ring. He will not hear of this engagement!'

Jasmin was furious because Tatine was implying that her father would stop the engagement for Margot's sake. She longed to tell her what he had revealed in Vinal Haven, but it was not her place to inform Margot that he was in love with her mother. She looked at Tatine angrily. 'You don't know anything about it! Let me go, Tatine!'

She tried to walk on, but Tatine shook her. 'Ah! — you are stubborn! Very well, mademoiselle, you brought this on yourself. If you persist in going to your father, I will tell you why you cannot marry Tony. There is a reason which they are all afraid to give you. They are fools — you should know the truth. Tony is your half brother.'

Jasmin stared into her eyes, and the wicked look of triumph in them rose up and engulfed her. She could hear the lake water lapping behind them, and Anola Frisbee singing as she hung some dishcloths on a tree beside the kitchen door. The scent of wood-smoke drifted over them and the mountain air was cool and fresh and clean. These were the things which belonged here in the quiet woods, but not this vile woman with black eyes.

'You don't believe me,' said Tatine, 'but it's true. I took care of Madame when the child was born — I know. Look at his eyes! They are just like yours.'

Eyes . . . Tony's eyes, gray and calm and loving. Tony's face, bending over her as she lay beside him under the pines. Tony's body, part of her own flesh . . . A wave of terrible nausea swept over her, but Tatine held her upright.

'They should have told you,' said the old woman with more feeling in her voice. 'They should have told him also, and then this would not have happened.'

Jasmin found her voice. 'Let me go, Tatine,' she said wearily. 'You have nothing to worry about. I'm going home.'

She wanted to crawl into the woods behind Dirigo Point like some wounded animal until this dreadful sickness was over. In her torment she thought of the spring in the clearing — she would

go there and bathe her face in cold water and lie down on the moss for a long while.

'Take your hand away, Tatine,' she repeated.

The old woman freed her, and she walked toward the wharf with blind steps. A little wind had risen with the approach of evening and the lake was wrinkled with tiny waves. As the boat moved away from the shore, they splashed against the bow with a cool, refreshing sound and soothed her brain, which seemed to be on fire. It was a sound she had loved from childhood and she was grateful for it.

Now she knew why she and Tony loved the same things, why these bonds, which had been so miraculous in the beginning, had been so strong. Tony had said one day that he loved the sound of water along the keel of a boat; it was only one of a thousand little things they had in common.

'*Nous sommes en rapport*,' he had said once, lapsing into French because he couldn't think of a phrase in English which expressed their deep sense of companionship.

Yes, they were *en rapport*; and the thing which had once seemed more amazing and more satisfying than anything in the world now had the terrible, destroying beauty of a two-edged sword.

Nausea swept over her again, leaving her exhausted. She was too weak to get as far as the clearing — she wanted to go to bed. If anyone asked her what was wrong, she would have to say she had eaten something which had disagreed with her. She couldn't go into the woods alone.

Sandy was on the wharf, cleaning a fish. He helped her out, and when she said she was ill, he asked her why she didn't come home in the *Firefly*. He was so alarmed he forgot to ask her if she had remembered to buy him a berth to New York.

'I was all right when I left the Outlet,' she answered, thinking fast. 'I began to feel sick on the way home.'

'You need brandy,' he said. 'I'll go up to the house and get you some.'

'No, Sandy,' she replied, 'I couldn't keep it down. All I need is a little sleep—I'll be all right by dinner time.' She wanted to get away from him quickly. Not even Sandy's love and sympathy could help her now.

'Very well,' he said. 'Call me if you need me. Your mother and grandmother are both out.'

In her room she lay down on the bed and covered her eyes. She could hear the birds chanting in the balsam trees and Roddy yapping at a rabbit or a porcupine. Her eyes were hot and dry, for the pain around her heart was too horrible for tears. The room began to fill with shadows and the cool fragrance of evening, and after she had lain there for an hour she got up and found a pen and some writing paper.

'Dear Tony,' she wrote, 'I am going away from here tomorrow because I need a little trip. You mustn't try to follow me, or write to me. When I saw the ring today, it brought me to my senses — you and I never could be happy. I'm older than you are, but added to that, our families hate each other so that our life together would be miserable. I just can't face it. I'm afraid I don't love you enough to take a chance on being terribly unhappy. I know what divorce is like. Jasmin.'

The ring was still on her finger. She had been in such mortal pain that she had forgotten it. She left it there for a moment longer, because it was the symbol of something which had once been very beautiful, and then she took it off and lay down again on the bed.



## *Chapter XXVI*

MRS. EMERY was anchored in a pool halfway up the river. The weather was still warm, and the black flies were troublesome, but she was paying very little attention to them. She brushed them away with absent gestures while she thought over certain things which had been puzzling her all afternoon. Jasmin had had a peculiar stomach upset the night before and looked white as a sheet at luncheon time, and Sandy had suddenly announced that he was leaving and had taken the early morning train to Boston. She was sure the two things had no connection, but they might have had something to do with Laura's distracted manner. If you spoke to her she answered in monosyllables or not at all.

Mrs. Emery sighed unhappily, and went on fishing.

Bert was asleep in the bow of the boat with his hat over his nose. She stopped thinking about Laura for a moment and looked at him. His face was very lined. He was getting old—they both were—but Bert showed the ravages of time more than she did. She remembered the first day he had appeared in camp. He was a gawky youth—all wrists—with an Adam's apple which moved up and down when he ate, which he did constantly in those days. Laurence had hired him to chop the wood and fill the lamps and clean the fish, but Bert showed a decided preference for what he called 'guidin,' although it consisted mostly of anchoring over the fish and taking a quiet nap. He was lazy, she supposed, but he had given over forty years of

friendship and loyalty in place of other qualities he might have had which were not nearly as valuable.

Mrs. Emery let the line drift across the stream, while her mind drifted back into the past. She thought of Laurence, long ago, in a straw hat with a highly colored band around it. He was just out of college, and his manner was haughty. But he'd fallen in love with her, as he admitted humbly a few days later, at first sight. They were married the following June, and he brought her to Winnebago on her wedding trip.

It could have been a fatal mistake, because lots of girls she knew would have turned around and gone home again, but she had stayed for forty-seven years.

Her mind wandered on, until it came to a certain summer when Laura was about five years old, and Sophie was almost eight, and Laurence had brought Henry Ballard into camp. Henry had fallen in love with her very quickly, but she couldn't send him away without making some explanation to Laurence, so she let him stay. Forty years afterward, she realized that Laurence must have known what was going on, but had trusted her not to lose her head . . . But that unfortunate period was only a memory, something she seldom thought about any more. It had never mattered very much.

Bert opened his eyes and looked at her. 'Tired of fishin'?' he asked.

'No,' she replied, 'I was just thinking . . . Bert, do you remember the summer we had the naphtha launch?'

'That was the summer Mr. Ballard was here. Sure I remember it, because I was in the damn boat when it blew up.'

'I was the one who made Mr. Emery buy that boat,' she said ruefully. 'I thought it was very dashing.'

'Whatever happened to Mr. Ballard?' asked Bert. 'I ain't seen him for years.'

'He's married and living in Boston,' she replied, and then forgot Henry. She made another cast, and the dry-fly moved slowly

along the dark current, carrying her mind with it again . . . It would have been better for Laura if she had inherited her father's philosophy. Then she would have trusted Roger not to lose his head entirely. Men were such fools about women, especially bad women, who seemed to be irresistible. But Roger would have come back, because men are fundamentally innocent and after a while bad women shock them.

'Ain't you goin' home?' asked Bert. 'It's six o'clock.'

'The days are so long in June,' she replied, 'I didn't realize how late it was.'

She reeled in her line and the rowboat sailed idly down the river between the overhanging banks where the meadow-rue was growing tall and lacy and the crowding alders were in full leaf. The light on the river had a golden quality at the end of day, and each ripple in the current was gilded softly with dying sunlight. When they came out upon the lake the water was pale blue instead of the bright cobalt of midday. A pair of loons dove at their approach, and high in the air hung a single gull. Thinking aloud, she said: 'It never loses its charm!'

'What's that?' said Bert, pausing with his oars suspended above the water.

'I was talking about Winnebago,' she answered. 'I'm just as excited about it as I was when I first came here.'

'I was tryin' to figure out this mornin' how long I've been workin' for ye—how long is it?'

'Forty-seven years . . .

"And fifty years are little room . . .  
To see the cherry hung with snow."

Not recognizing the quotation, Bert rowed on.

Laura heard her mother's voice and rose to her feet. The boat was almost at the wharf. She had been waiting for her for over an hour. Another five minutes and she would have gone after her, but her mother had come home.

Laura opened the door, and as Mrs. Emery came up the path she exclaimed, ‘What kept you so long? I thought you’d never come home!’

‘What’s the matter now,’ said Mrs. Emery.

‘Jasmin — ’ she began helplessly, and then words failed her.

‘What’s happened? — has she got another pain? I said last night it might be appendicitis.’

‘No, it’s not appendicitis,’ replied Laura, ‘it’s something worse. Don’t stand there on the porch, Mother, come inside!’

Mrs. Emery followed her into the living-room. ‘Where is she, upstairs?’

‘No — she’s gone. She left this afternoon while I was taking a nap. When I woke up I found a note under the door.’

Mrs. Emery sat down slowly in the nearest chair. ‘She’s probably gone to Boston. I was afraid she’d do that. Tony must have sent for her. They’ll be married before we can stop them — but it was inevitable.’

Laura’s face was gray and her body was taut with emotion. ‘No, Mother,’ she said desperately, ‘that’s not it . . . I still haven’t told you everything. She ended by saying that she had changed her mind about Tony. She’s not going to see him again.’

After a pause Mrs. Emery said, ‘That doesn’t make sense.’

‘No,’ agreed Laura, ‘it doesn’t. That’s why we’ve got to find her right away.’

‘What do you *think* is wrong?’

‘I have no idea,’ replied Laura swiftly, avoiding her mother’s eyes. ‘But I know we’ve got to do something — we’ve got to find her — or we’ll never forgive ourselves.’

‘The first thing we’re going to do is send for Roger.’

‘Oh, no!’ cried Laura in protest, ‘I don’t want him here!’

‘That’s not the point,’ said Mrs. Emery. ‘She’s his child, too — he ought to know about this.’

Laura had to admit her mother was right, but she maintained a stubborn silence.

'Listen, Laura,' said Mrs. Emery patiently, 'I have something to say to you. As long as we seem to be in the middle of another crisis, we might as well be frank. You've seen Roger several times since he's been here, and you wouldn't have seen him unless you wanted to—'

'How do you know I've seen him?' interrupted Laura.

'Mothers' intuition,' said Mrs. Emery dryly. 'My suspicions were confirmed when Sandy left.'

'That's not why he left,' replied Laura. '— I'm sorry you found out I'd seen Roger. I'm not going to see him again, and I'm *not* going to send for him now. I don't *need* him,' she ended wildly.

'That's what I'm trying to say to you,' continued Mrs. Emery. 'You'd better think twice, Laura, before you throw him out of your life again. Roger may be weak, and he may be thoughtless, but you've got to realize that no man is perfect. If there are six out of ten things you like in a man, that's a good average. There were lots of things about your father that upset me, but when the moment came—when I could have left him for another man—I found there were more things about him that I liked than there were about the other one.'

This was not the moment to argue about Roger. Her mother didn't seem to understand how desperate the situation was—but then, she didn't know everything.

'Mother,' exclaimed Laura, 'I don't want to talk about Roger now. I'm really frantic! I've got to find Jasmin before—before she does something silly. If I only knew where she'd gone!'

Laura opened the front door again, almost as though she hoped to see a boat coming back from the Outlet with a small figure huddled in the stern. But the lake was calm and silent, and the only thing she could see was a lone sheldrake.

She closed the door again, and her mother said, 'Jasmin won't do anything foolish, Laura. Try to take this more calmly. I'm sure she's all right.'

'You don't know,' replied Laura with a shiver, '— you don't know!'

Mrs. Emery rose. 'If you're not going to send for Roger, I am. I can't handle this thing alone. You may not think you need help, but I do. — How are we going to find her? — two lone women!'

Laura was silent, although her eyes were full of unspoken protest. She stared blindly at the birch logs on the hearth and a dull flush crept over her neck . . . Roger was coming back into her life again. Fate was throwing them together and there was nothing she could do about it. This was something beyond her control. It wasn't as though she were crawling back to him . . . With a feeling of resignation she moved toward the desk.

Laura heard the outboard splutter and die and then Roger's footsteps on the wharf. She felt she had been sitting there for hours, but in reality it was less than sixty minutes. Bert had taken her note down to the Outlet at six-thirty, and it was now only seven-twenty-five.

'Mother,' she said in a strained voice, 'I'd like to see him alone for a moment — do you mind?'

When her mother had gone, she opened the door. Roger was halfway up the path and when he saw her his footsteps quickened. 'What's wrong, Laura?' he asked. 'I couldn't make any sense out of your note.'

'I had to see you,' she replied. 'Jasmin's run away.'

'Why?'

'Don't you know? — Listen, Roger,' as he did not answer, 'this is up to you, now. For God's sake, tell me the truth! Is that boy your son, or isn't he?'

Roger looked at her without speaking, and a look of incredulity spread over his face.

'I'm sure someone has told her he is,' she went on desperately, 'and that's why she's run away.'

As he looked at her, his surprise changed to horror. ‘Laura!’ he exclaimed in disgust, ‘you don’t mean to tell me that you think — yourself — that —’

‘I’ve never known,’ she replied.

‘But for God’s sake, *why?* — how could you have possibly thought that Tony —’

‘He has dark eyebrows and gray eyes like yours.’

‘Do you mean to say you’ve built this thing up out of a chance resemblance?’

‘— And he has little tricks and gestures,’ continued Laura inexorably, ‘that are exactly like yours.’

‘What, for instance?’

‘For one thing, the way he handles a gun —’

‘Laura — !’ exclaimed Roger hopelessly. ‘He’s the image of Barclay. If you want to find a resemblance, it’s there all right!’

She turned away, and Roger added: ‘I’m appalled at you! I can see what’s happened. You’ve built up this thing in your imagination until you actually believe it. You’ve gone around telling yourself that I was not only unfaithful to you, but had a little bastard as well. I suppose that’s one of the reasons why my reception in Winnebago was so chilly.’

Laura interrupted him wearily. ‘I’ve never told anyone this — Mother has no idea why I don’t want Jasmin to marry Tony. I’ve never breathed a word of it to anyone but you.’

‘What in hell made you think he was my son?’

‘Do you remember the summer Jasmin and I went to England?’ she replied. ‘She was seven or eight years old. I was sitting on the beach at Frinton one day when I saw Margot trailing by. She didn’t see me, and I hid behind a magazine I was reading. She had her child with her, and his hat blew off, and he came running back for it. He picked it up and looked at me — and then he smiled — and I knew.’

‘You didn’t know a damn thing,’ retorted Roger.

‘How can you prove it?’

In the pause that followed, she could hear the clock ticking and her heart beating dully against her ribs. This was the end — the climax of twenty-five years of pain and doubt and longing and desperation. He must know that it was, for she had said everything there was to say.

Roger crossed the room and stood in front of her. ‘Do I have to prove it, Laura? Don’t you love me enough to believe me?’

‘Believe you,’ she replied with a scornful laugh, ‘after what you did to me two days ago — ?’

‘I knew you’d bring that up,’ he said quietly. ‘I saw you standing in the door, and I didn’t follow you because I didn’t want to give the show away. The less Margot knows about you and me, the better. She’s a very bitter woman, Laura, and she has it in for you.’

‘Why? — what have I done to Margot?’ said Laura with contempt. ‘I’m the one who ought to feel bitter.’

‘She knows why I wouldn’t marry her,’ returned Roger.

‘Why didn’t you?’ she asked, for it was a question no one had ever answered to her satisfaction.

‘Why didn’t I marry her — ?’ he echoed. ‘I told you I was in love with you, but you wouldn’t believe me. You went ahead and divorced me, but I had no intention of marrying her. I told you that, but you wouldn’t listen.’

‘Then why did you have such a terrific affair with her, if you weren’t in love with her?’

‘It wasn’t a “terrific affair.” It was a rather boring little flirtation, and I never wanted to sleep with her.’

Still she did not believe him. Those rendezvous up the river! — something must have happened on one of them. Margot wasn’t the sort of woman who would be satisfied with a kiss or two — she would have demanded more and more until she finally had everything.

‘Roger,’ said Laura slowly, ‘I didn’t want to see you again. But I had to see you because of Jasmin. She’s your responsibility —

you got her into this mess twenty years ago when you began to play with fire. You're the only one, now, who can stop her from marrying Tony.'

'I don't want to stop her,' said Roger. 'There's no reason why I should. I tried to at first, because I didn't think he'd make her happy, but she's in love with him, and I think she ought to have him.'

Laura sank down upon the fire-bench. She realized he was telling the truth—that even if he had slept with Margot, Tony was not his son. This was the only way he had of proving it. If Tony had been his son, he would have done everything to stop this marriage.'

'It was all in your imagination,' Roger exclaimed gently, taking her hand. 'But I understand. You hate Margot, and you have every right to hate her, but you've got to forget her.'

'How can I, if you're going to let Jasmin marry Tony?' she returned.

'We'll go away,' he said. 'I'll get transferred to South America.'

'But I don't want to leave Jasmin!' she demurred. 'I don't want to go that far away.'

'Very well, make your choice—Jasmin or Margot.'

Then Laura realized what she had been saying, and a low flush of dismay crept over her pale face. She tried to draw away her hands, but Roger held them firmly. 'No, Laura,' he exclaimed, 'you've said it. You said it without thinking, but I'm going to hold you to it. It's ridiculous for you and me not to get married again.'

'I don't love you,' she replied.

'How can you say that after what happened in the clearing? I don't think you were making a pretense of loving me, that afternoon.'

'I had a momentary brainstorm. — Please let go of my hands — you're hurting me!'

He released her with a gesture of apology. 'Laura, you know

you're in love with me. Why are you trying to put me off? You're not worried about Margot, are you?' he exclaimed in disgust.

'No, but I think it was tactless of you to have lunch with her, under the circumstances.'

'I didn't have lunch with her,' said Roger impatiently; 'she had lunch with me. She came bounding into the dining-room and said her outboard had broken down. I couldn't tell her to go away. After all, it's a public dining-room!'

Laura felt suddenly cold. She found a match and lit the fire, and asked Roger if he would like a highball.

'No, I don't want a drink,' he replied. 'I want to talk to you first. You've got to look at this thing a little more objectively. There are a great many reasons why it would be stupid of us not to get married. I've been lonely as the devil, and so have you. I don't like being a bachelor, and I don't think you like being single either. But aside from that—'

He broke off and a faint grin appeared in his eyes.

'You asked me just now why I didn't marry again. Well, why didn't you?'

'I almost did,' she replied.

'Almost, but not quite.'

She made no comments, and he sat down and took her hands again. This time she did not try to draw them away. He kissed them gently, and then he put his arm around her. She felt suddenly very tired — tired from years of longing — and she turned to him and closed her eyes. He held her in silence, and after a while he kissed her on the mouth.

'I hear someone down on the wharf,' she said.

'It's probably Bert.'

'Bert's having supper in the kitchen,' she replied. A wild pang of hope surged through her and she exclaimed: 'It may be Jasmin — go and see!'

He rose swiftly, but before he reached the door it opened suddenly and Tony stood on the threshold.

'Hello,' he said, 'is Jasmin here?'

Their silence was disconcerting, and the hope in his own eyes died out.

'I came here first,' he said. He was in uniform and Laura wondered how he had managed to get leave. Roger asked him to come in and he sat down and buried his head in his hands.

'I wish to God I knew what was wrong,' he said in a muffled voice. 'I got a note from her saying she was never going to see me again—and I swear I don't know what I've done! I can't understand it! Her last letter was sweet and affectionate—and then I get this thing!'

'Did she give any reasons for not seeing you again?' asked Roger.

'Yes, plenty of them,' replied Tony, 'but none of her reasons made any sense.'

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## *Chapter XXVII*

MRS. EMERY looked over the banisters with a feeling of concern. The boy was terribly upset. His uniform added to her dismay. It deepened the note of urgency in the room, which was already taut with it. Laura was sitting on the edge of a chair with her hands clasped, and Roger was talking to him in a low voice.

Tony took his hands away from his face and looked up. 'I can't understand it, Mr. Hawthorne,' he said. 'I got a letter from her the day before, and she was friendly and affectionate—in fact, she was more affectionate than usual. Then I get *this* thing! — We were going to be married next week,' he added. 'I'd made the arrangements. The Skipper knew about it—that's why he let me off.'

Hearing this, Mrs. Emery reflected that his commanding officer must have been a good man. She moved slowly downstairs, and Roger said, 'Good-evening, Mrs. Emery. Tony says he got a letter from Jasmin this morning, but she wouldn't tell him where she was.'

'I told Laura earlier this evening that I don't think Jasmin would do anything foolish,' said Mrs. Emery. 'Laura's worrying too much.'

'I know, Mother, but—' exclaimed Laura.

'Jasmin hates drama—always did. — Tony, have you any idea why she went away?'

'No, Mrs. Emery,' he replied.

She sat down opposite him and picked up her knitting. She was sure that Jasmin had gone quietly away to think things over. She didn't believe for one minute that she had left Tony for good, or was in such a frenzy that she would try to kill herself. Something had happened—she was sure of that—but the mystery would explain itself in time.

'Where do *you* think she is, Mrs. Emery?' added Tony.

'I don't know. She may be in Vinal Haven. I happen to know she had very little money in the bank, so she can't have gone very far. Last month she bought a new dress, or something.'

'It was a hat,' said Laura.

Roger's face was serious, but not alarmed. Like Mrs. Emery, he felt that Jasmin knew what she was doing and would take care of herself. He was more worried over Tony, who was beginning to look desperate. He said to him: 'I think she's in New York. A few weeks ago she told me she was trying to get a job on the radio. I'd look for her there, if I were you.'

'Yes, and you can telephone Sophie at Vinal Haven,' added Mrs. Emery. 'I'm sure you'll find her in a day or two.'

'I want to find her before that,' said Tony. His eyes strayed to Laura and she returned his gaze with an unfathomable look. He was still undecided whether she wanted him as a son-in-law—whether, like the others, she had become human and changed her mind—but at the moment it didn't matter very much. He rose to his feet.

'Let's all have a drink,' suggested Laura. 'What do you want, Tony—Scotch or Bourbon?'

'Neither, thanks. I haven't got time. I'm going down to the camp, now. Mother doesn't know I'm here.'

Laura was about to say that he looked as though he needed a drink, but the expression in his eyes stopped her. There was some reason why he had to see his mother, and it was best not to ask him why. He opened the door, and Roger followed him out into the night.

Margot was sitting in the living-room with her small, prettily clad feet on the fender and an uncut novel — *vient de paraître* — on her lap. Tatine was clearing away the supper dishes, and as the door opened she was humming softly and tonelessly under her breath.

Tony walked into the room and tossed his cap on the sofa.

'Good evening, Mother!' he said briefly.

Margot gave a stifled gasp and took her feet off the fender. 'What are you doing here, darling?' she said in astonishment.

Tony hunted through the room for his own cigarettes, lit one, and threw the match at the fire-screen.

When he did not answer her, Margot's voice grew sharper. 'Why didn't you let us know you were coming? Do you think it's fair to keep me always in the dark this way?'

'Mother,' he said with a frown, 'I didn't even have time to send you a wire. I suddenly found I could get leave, and I had to rush like the devil to catch a plane for Lewiston.'

'Well, it was darling of you to come,' she said dryly, '— but why did you?'

The remark was intended to be sarcastic, but he took it seriously and she was frightened by his manner. 'I'll tell you why I came,' he said in a voice she had never heard him use before.

Tatine moved slowly into the room and sat down on the sofa. Her face was devoid of expression.

'I know why you came,' exclaimed Margot, 'you don't have to tell me! — I suppose we're not going to have the pleasure of your company very long — you'll be running back to Dirigo Point!'

'No,' he said coldly, 'I'm not going back to Dirigo Point to-night. I'll have to go much farther if I want to see Jasmin. — I don't know how much you had to do with this, Mother, but yesterday I got a letter from her saying she was finished with me.'

'Is she?' said Margot.

'She's gone somewhere, and she asked me not to follow her. What did you say to her?'

Margot's eyebrows rose, and she replied coolly, '*— I say to her? I haven't seen Jasmin! I'm sure I'm delighted that she's finished with you, but I had nothing to do with it.*'

'I don't believe you,' said Tony.

Margot gave a little shrug. There were a lot of things he could have said about her feelings toward Laura, but he fought them back because, after all, she was his mother. He had no illusions about her whatever, but he loved her. There were a few threads of gray in her golden hair, owing to the fact that the hairdresser in the village didn't have the proper dye, and he felt a pang of sympathy. She was growing old, not dramatically like Laura, but simply fading a little. She looked tired, and she was unhappy.

'Very well,' he said at last, 'if you won't tell me what you said to her, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to marry her as soon as I've found her.'

'You haven't found her yet,' Margot replied.

His cigarette had gone out, and as he hunted for another one he became conscious of Tatine. Her face was sullen and inscrutable and her black eyes were fixed on the rug. 'She knows what Mother said to Jasmin,' he thought, '*— the old she-devil! But she'll never tell.*'

'I wouldn't try to find her,' added Margot with a scornful laugh. 'Where's your pride? She doesn't want you any more. She's through with you. I knew it wouldn't last.'

'You're wrong,' said Tony. 'Jasmin is still in love with me—I could read between the lines. I don't know what you've done to make her run away, but whatever it was, it worked.'

'If she was really in love with you,' smiled Margot, 'nothing I could say would change her mind.'

Tony bit his lip; and the ghost of a smile flitted across Tatine's face—Margot had scored nicely that time.

'All right,' he said quietly, 'you win! — But I'm going to find her.'

He turned toward the sofa where he had thrown his cap and met Tatine's eyes. The old woman finally spoke.

'Your mother said nothing,' she exclaimed in French; 'she is telling the truth. Madame has been ill — she had another *crise de nerfs*. You are a fool to go in search of that girl. I am old, and I am wise. I know what sort she is. That girl is through with you.'

'I think, if you don't mind,' said Tony, resorting to sarcasm at the last in an effort to control his mounting anger, 'I'll go and find that out for myself!'

He strode angrily across the room, but at the door he turned and said in a calmer voice, 'Good-night, Mother. I'll write you.'

'Good-bye, Tony,' replied Margot.

As the door closed behind him, she looked at Tatine, but Tatine was brushing some ashes off the sofa.



## *Chapter XXVIII*

T

HE OUTLINE of the hills was beginning to show against the paling sky and the stars were fading as Tony crossed the bridge at Lewiston. The sleeping town was fragrant with the scent of lilacs, and the vegetable gardens beside the houses were green with spring. He turned and looked back at the mountains. He had been happier there than he had ever been before—and more unhappy, too. But he had found something that he needed, and he and Jasmin would come back again sometime and find it again.

He drove on. The white road ran interminably southward beside rolling fields filled with new corn. Here and there a brook meandered under the road, and every mile or so there was a white farmhouse sleeping under the shadow of a large red barn and a clump of elms. Although he was worried and unhappy, he noticed the passing country, and he wished Jasmin could see it because it was rather wonderful in the dawn.

By the time he reached Portland, morning had dawned in earnest. He left the car in a garage, to be taken back to Winnebago, and walked to the station. The platform was swarming with summer campers off the State of Maine Express, and he had difficulty in getting into the restaurant. After a few minutes he found a seat at the counter, and while he waited for a cup of coffee he wondered what to do next. It was a bit early to call Aunt Sophie, but if he explained how urgent it was she might forgive him. He couldn't call New York because, he knew, the telephone had been turned off for the summer.

An old colored porter paused beside him. 'Are you takin' the train for Fa'mington, suh?'

Tony shook his head. 'No, I'm afraid not, this time.'

The old man looked him over with a puzzled expression. 'I cain't remember you, suh, and I knows most everybody that takes the train to Fa'mington.'

'I certainly wish I were going back there,' said Tony absently. He was trying to remember Aunt Sophie's telephone number in Vinal Haven. By the time the old man's words finally penetrated his distracted mind, he was halfway through his coffee. He gave an exclamation and left his unfinished breakfast on the counter.

The old porter was piling baggage on the Farmington train. Tony waited until he was through, and then he said, 'Do you know anybody in Winnebago?'

'Yes, suh,' was the reply.

'Do you know Miss Hawthorne?'

'Miss Jasmin — ?'

'Yes!'

The old man took off his cap and scratched his head with a chuckle. 'Yes, suh, I knows Miss Jasmin! I knowed her since she was a little bit of a thing. She weren't no bigger'n *this* when they brought her up here the fust time! I knowed her for years and years — I been workin' in this station for a long while, suh.'

'Have you seen her lately?'

'Yes, suh, I saw her about a month ago. She was on her way up to camp.'

'— And you haven't seen her since?'

'Yes, suh, I seen her.'

Tony took a deep breath and relaxed against a baggage truck. The Farmington train was about to leave; a conductor swung past them, calling 'All aboard!' There was a jangle of bells, and the cars started to move. Above the snorting engine Tony exclaimed, 'When did you see her?'

'I seen her — I guess it was yesterday. — No, day before yesterday.'

'Where was she going? — can you remember that?'

'Yes, suh! I put her on the State of Maine Express. She had section eight, car fifty-two.'

Tony breathed more easily. During his night ride he had imagined a great many things, but she had only gone to New York. All he had to do now was follow her as quickly as possible. The old porter was looking at him again with a curious expression. Tony pulled some dollar bills out of his pocket.

"Thanks so much!" he exclaimed, handing them to him.

The old man accepted the tip and stuffed it in his pocket, but his eyes were still puzzled. Then the truth dawned on him. 'Yes, suh!' he said with a grin, 'yes, suh, she's a mighty fine girl, Miss Jasmin! She's one of the sweetest young girls I know, suh! I wish you all kinds of luck.'

Tony grinned in reply. It was a long time since he'd been as light-hearted as this. He wished he'd given the old man ten dollars instead of five. Luck! — perhaps he'd have it now. What he needed most was a seat on a plane.

It was early afternoon when he reached New York. He was afraid all the way in from the airport that she'd be lunching somewhere, that he'd have to wait until evening. He didn't want another hour of suspense and worry. He knew he still had trouble ahead of him. If she had been upset enough to run away, there was something very wrong.

The taxi stopped in front of the door. He got out and paid the taxi, because if she wasn't there he was going to the park and walk off some of his tension. The doorman appeared; and he said without much hope, 'Is Miss Hawthorne here?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the doorman unexpectedly.

'That's good,' said Tony blankly, and then his fears suddenly vanished. The mere fact that she was there was an omen. The worries and anxieties which had haunted him all night dropped

away, leaving his mind free and his confidence unimpaired. She was in love with him—she wouldn't send him away now that he had come for her. The other things—the confusion of the past few weeks, his mother's and Laura's bitterness, then tension in Winnebago—seemed ridiculously small. It was all so petty—a hurricane over nothing. He'd been influenced by it himself for a while, but never again. There had been a moment or two when he had lost his sense of proportion, but he was all right now. It was a pity that the older generation lived in the past. The incidents of twenty years ago seemed as important to them as their present lives, and the future was something which didn't seem to interest them. A sense of the present was simply another name for a sense of proportion, and the future was another name for hope.

He rang the bell peremptorily, and after what seemed a long while he heard Jasmin's footsteps. She opened the door, and a look he couldn't fathom went over her face.

‘Tony—I’ she faltered.

‘How are you?’ he said briefly.

She grew alarmingly pale and her hand went up to her throat. ‘How did you know I was here?’ she said in an odd voice.

‘Your father told me to look here first.’

‘Oh!’

Her voice was baffling—she could have meant anything by that exclamation. She was struggling with herself—something was going on in her mind which was beyond him.

‘Aren't you going to let me come in?’ he smiled.

‘— You say Father told you I was here?’ she echoed, still barring his way. ‘When did you see Father?’

‘Last night. I've been to Winnebago, Jasmin! — Luckily, I knew you were here, because I saw the porter who put you on the State of Maine.’

‘You mean old Johnny . . .’ she said slowly. ‘— So Father told you where I was, and asked you to come after me?’

'Yes, he was worried and he wanted me to follow you.'

She had not moved, but he was tired of waiting so he stepped over the threshold and closed the door.

Jasmin leaned back against the wall. 'What did he say about us — about our getting married?'

'Plenty. I had a long talk with him on the wharf. He was upset for some reason and said, "If she won't marry you, for God's sake, don't listen to her." Your mother was a bit cool toward me, but as far as I could see he was handling her beautifully.'

Jasmin wasn't listening to him. The hall had grown suddenly dim and the blood was draining out of her hands and feet . . . Her father wanted them to marry . . . Then what Tatine had said wasn't true at all . . . Why had she ever believed her? Tony had warned her that Tatine was a crazy old woman with a mother complex, and she had been angry with Roger because he had told Margot definitely, once and for all, that he wasn't in love with her and never had been . . .

She swayed a little and Tony put his arm around her. 'Come on, darling,' he said gently, 'let's go and sit down. You look worn out.'

He took her into the living-room and sat down beside her. She had been deathly pale, but the color was gradually coming back into her cheeks. She gave him a feeble smile and he said, 'I don't know what all this is about, and I don't want to know. Let's forget it.'

'Yes,' she replied, 'let's not speak of it again. — Tony, when are we getting married?'

'The day after tomorrow,' he said, and drew her gently into his arms. They sat there for a long time in silence while the afternoon sunlight moved across the floor.

















